

103
NOMINATION OF HERSEL W. GOBER TO BE
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Y 4. V 64/4: S. HRG. 103-64

Nomination of Hershell W. Gober to... KING
BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JANUARY 22, 1993

Printed for the use of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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NOMINATION OF HERSEL W. GOBER TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 1993

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m., in room SR-418, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. John D. Rockefeller IV (Chairman of the Committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Rockefeller, Daschle, Murkowski, Thurmond, and Specter.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. This hearing will come to order.

The Chairman will state for the record that the last time I was late for an official meeting was August 14, 1923. [Laughter.]

Since we have both Senator Bumpers and Senator Pryor present, rather than proceeding with the statements first, let's go ahead with the introduction by the Senators from Arkansas of their friend.

Senator Bumpers.

STATEMENT OF HON. DALE BUMPERS, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

Senator BUMPERS. First of all, Mr. Chairman, let me congratulate you on becoming Chairman of this very prestigious Committee. This Committee is very important to every Member of the Senate. I know you are going to do a very outstanding job. And the fact that you called me here this morning shows just how discreet you are. [Laughter.]

Mr. Chairman and Senator Murkowski, Senator Daschle, Senator Thurmond, it is a pleasure to come here and introduce a fellow Arkansan to you. Hershel Gober has been a friend of mine for a very long time. I frankly thought that the President might very well pick him for the top spot, but we also have an outstanding person selected for that. It isn't often that a President like President Clinton, or any other President for that matter, gets a chance to nominate someone whom he has known for years and has absolutely no reservation or hesitation about the kind of job he is going to do. And such is the case here this morning.

Hershel Gober was appointed by then Governor Clinton back in 1988 as head of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Arkansas. We have about 261,000 veterans in Arkansas so I don't have to tell you how important that post is, and I don't have to tell any Member around this table how important the veterans' organizations in their respective States are. This is probably a little bit unbecoming,

but, quite frankly, the last head of the Department of Veteran Affairs I had difficulty with. I just didn't think he was quite as sensitive to some of the, not macro problems, but some of the micro problems. I think you are going to see an entirely different attitude.

The real strength of Hershel Gober is that he is not just a veteran, he is a battle-scarred veteran. He holds numerous medals, including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. He was wounded in Vietnam commanding an infantry company. He put in 3 years in the Marine Corps first, which, in my opinion, qualifies him for anything he wants. [Laughter.]

And then a subsequent 17 years in the Army, from which he was honorably discharged some time ago.

The thing that I guess the people around here will come to respect about Hershel more than anything else is often veterans' organizations come here pleading a particular cause. I have never seen Hershel Gober jump in the tank on something for political reasons. I have seen him as compassionate, as concerned about the affairs of veterans as individuals, not necessarily as organizations, but as individuals who serve their country and who are entitled to some consideration. He doesn't hesitate to tell veterans' organizations when he thinks they are off track or they are asking for something they are not really entitled to or something that we simply cannot afford to do.

I think the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to do extremely well under his deputy secretaryship, and it is a real honor for me to be here with him this morning to say these things to this Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Bumpers appears on p. 25.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. That's a very generous introduction Senator Bumpers. We thank you.

Senator Pryor.

STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID PRYOR, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

Senator PRYOR. Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

In our Little Rock office where we do most of our veterans case-work, we have a young man—I wish he could be here today; he had to go back to Arkansas yesterday—who works our veterans cases and he is on our veterans desk in the office in Little Rock. A year or two ago I was talking to him, just "How are you doing, Mark? How are things going in the office? How do you like your job?" and what have you. He says, "You know, the thing that impresses me most of all about my dealings with veterans problems is Hershel Gober. Because Hershel Gober takes each individual case, each veteran and their families' concern as his own concern."

Mr. Chairman, I think that is the type of person our President has chosen to be the Deputy Secretary of this very, very fine organization that serves veterans across our country. Every veteran in the State of Arkansas knows who Hershel Gober is because he is their friend. And I would dare say that in a year or two or perhaps three, every veteran in America is going to know who Hershel

Gober is because he is going to be their friend as he has been the friend of the Arkansas veteran.

I am just so honored to be here this morning, Mr. Chairman. I would like to note that just last year in September the National Associations of State Directors of Veterans presented Hershel with the Melvin Dixon Award. I don't know of any higher honor that he could have received. But I am just honored to have known Hershel for a long time, to have worked with him, and the veterans truly are going to have a friend in this man.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, Senator Pryor.

I would have to observe that I can't think of two better friends that I have in the U.S. Senate than the two Senators from the State of Arkansas. And the fact that you both came and spoke so genuinely, clearly from your hearts, about Hershel Gober is a pretty good way to start off the nomination.

Senator BUMPERS. Mr. Chairman, if I might mention this, and I think trivia buffs this week have had a wonderful week of collecting trivia and what have you, but one little dab of trivia I might like to leave, Hershel knows this, is now there are three former Governors of Arkansas who are all gainfully employed. [Laughter.]

Two of them are here surrounding Mr. Gober and the other one I won't mention; I think you know where he is. I'm not sure this city is prepared for three former Governors of Arkansas. [Laughter.]

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that my formal statement be admitted to the record.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Both Senators' statements will be included in the record.

Senator BUMPERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Mr. Chairman, if I could just interrupt before the two Senators from Arkansas leave, it isn't very often that claims are made on a nominee, but I would like the record to note that the gentleman in question was also a resident of the State of Alaska for some 5 years. He graduated from Alaska Pacific University, formerly Alaska Methodist University, cum laude.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Explain to them what that means. [Laughter.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Would you pass the Latin dictionary. [Laughter.]

He also served in the Armed Forces in Alaska and lived in Fairbanks, which is my hometown. So in the interest of full disclosure, I mention his association with Alaska and our claim to him. And, as you and I both know, the Post Office always fouls up Alaska and Arkansas. [Laughter.]

So I wanted the record to note that you don't have sole claim. [Laughter.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Senators Bumpers and Pryor, I am sure you have less important things to do than we have here, so if you would want to be on your way.

Senator BUMPERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator PRYOR. Thank you very much.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN ROCKEFELLER

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. This, as my fellow Committee Members know, is a hearing to consider the nomination of Hershel Gober to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Hershel, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you here and your family. Some of your family is here and I would like to have you introduce them.

Mr. GOBER. Thank you, Senator. My wife, Olivia, my daughter, Elizabeth, who was born in Alaska. [Laughter.]

Her husband, Bobby Derryberry, my brother, Bill, his wife, Marilyn, his daughter, Kim, my niece, Jamie Gober. And I have a lot of friends here from Arkansas, veterans that are here to support me and I appreciate them.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. They are all welcome. All of you are very welcome and I hope you enjoy this, as I'm sure you will.

Hershel, you have done a wonderful job from everything that I've been able to find out in administering veterans affairs in Arkansas. You understand the obligations that we on this Committee have, and that all of us in this country have to those who served this country, both in terms of wartime service and peacetime service. As was pointed out by Senator Bumpers, you were in the Marine Corps, followed by a distinguished 17-year career in the Army, receiving a Bronze Star and Purple Heart. You have every reason to be here with great pride.

You came back to your home State of Arkansas in 1983 and committed yourself to supporting and working with veterans. You became Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs and your work there earned you the respect of your colleagues generally, and in 1992, the award, as was mentioned I believe by Senator Pryor, as the most effective State director from the National Association of State Directors. I assume that was the award he was referring to.

President Clinton has shown great confidence in you, your work, and your commitment to veterans by nominating you for this position, because there are very few nominations for something as high as the office that you are seeking. You bring to the VA a unique and valuable perspective on the relationship between, frankly, State Departments of Veterans Affairs and what goes on in the Federal Government, which is something that interests me very much because as a former Governor I was able to observe that it is not always a working relationship which is as good as it might be. That perspective will help you in building a closer partnership, which is what we're trying to do here.

You will have a close working relationship with the new President, by definition, and also very clearly, with Secretary Jesse Brown, which doesn't hurt. That should ensure that the coordinated voice of veterans and the many interests and legitimate concerns that they have will be heard and will be heard very clearly. I look forward to this happening.

In closing, I note, Hershel, that you have completed the Committee's Questionnaire for Presidential Nominees and have responded to my prehearing questions, all of which will appear in the record. Also included will be a letter from the Office of Government Ethics acknowledging that you are in compliance with laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest. I have reviewed, as has Senator Murkowski, the FBI report on you and find no bar to your con-

firmation. In the process of reviewing background materials, Hershel, members of the Committee staff even had the pleasure of reading many of your songs written during the Vietnam war. I hope you will spare those from us in your presentation. [Laughter.]

[The documents referred to appear on pp. 29-36.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. If you can't contain yourself, we will try to hold a quorum here as long as we can. [Laughter.]

So I look forward to it, and I would yield to Senator Murkowski and other Members before administering the mandatory oath to you.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Rockefeller appears on p. 25.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to defer to the senior Member of this Committee Senator Strom Thurmond at this time and reserve my right to a short opening statement. As you and I both know, Mr. Chairman, seniority plays a rather major role in the order of the U.S. Senate and I don't want this to be an exception.

Before I turn to Senator Thurmond, and in the interest of full disclosure, I think I might use this opportunity for a corrective announcement relative to a statement that I made at the last hearing of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Then, I indicated that Tony Principi, who is the past Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs, would take the position as Chief of Staff of the minority. Deferring to seniority again, and to my friend who is the former President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate and Ranking Republican Member of the Armed Services Committee, Mr. Principi is going to that committee as Chief of Staff. To this Committee comes Mr. John Moseman, on my right, who comes from the Intelligence Committee as the Chief of Staff for the minority, and who has assumed the position of Chief of Staff for the Republican minority of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

So with that clarification, I would defer to my senior colleague Senator Thurmond.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR THURMOND

Senator THURMOND. Thank you very much, Senator. That's very courteous of you.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to be here this morning. I want to join the Chairman and the Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee in extending a warm welcome to Deputy Secretary nominee Hershel Gober.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Gober is a veteran's veteran. He served 3 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and attained the rank of sergeant. He then attained the rank of major during his 17 years in the U.S. Army. His service includes two tours in Vietnam. He earned the soldier's medals of Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and many other service and commendation medals and awards.

Mr. Gober has served as a senior instructor for Junior ROTC at Warren High School in Arkansas. He was a State Adjutant of The American Legion in Arkansas. He was Director of the Arkansas Veterans' Child Welfare Service from 1985 to 1987. Since 1988, Mr. Gober has served as Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs. In September 1992, Mr. Gober was voted the most ef-

fective State director of veterans affairs by the National Association of State Directors.

Mr. Chairman, the record is clear that Mr. Gober has spent most of his life serving this Nation and its veterans. As a veteran of World War II, I believe Mr. Gober enlisted and officer status in the Marine Corps and Army give him a unique ability to understand the diverse needs of our veterans. I believe his service to the veterans of Arkansas will prove invaluable to the individual needs of our veterans.

Mr. Chairman, I have met with Mr. Gober and we have discussed his duties as Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I believe he is a man of integrity, ability, and dedication. I support the nomination of Hershel Gober as Deputy Secretary and I look forward to working with him upon his confirmation.

Mr. Chairman, I have another appointment if you will excuse me at this time. And thank you very much for your courtesy and I wish to thank the Ranking Member, my able friend, too. Thank you.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, Senator Thurmond.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURKOWSKI

Senator MURKOWSKI. Very briefly, Mr. Chairman. You have recognized Mr. Gober's family and it is gratifying to see you all here, particularly the lovely young Alaskan who is with us today, Elizabeth. [Laughter.]

It is certainly a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Gober. We've had an opportunity to visit.

I think it is fair to say that from everything I've seen and read and learned, I have no doubt that you are certainly qualified for this important post. You served the Nation as indicated, and as a former veteran, I can certainly recognize and appreciate the contribution that you have made to our Nation. I think you and I both agree that the debt that we owe to our veterans can never be properly repaid; the realization is we must do the best we can.

You, sir, have the extraordinary responsibility of being responsible for the administrative oversight of the largest health-care organization in the world and an organization that, as our new President indicated in his address to the Nation, must respond to change. You will find, sir, that change is something that some fear and others welcome. Your responsibility will be to determine how to weigh changes that must be made in the VA, and how to encourage veterans' organizations, who are well represented in this room today, to come forth as the liaison, if you will, between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Nation's veterans to communicate changes that are necessary. It will be your responsibility to prioritize the changes that must be undertaken, and I want to assure you that I will support your recommendations for change. I will support the budget that VA submits ultimately because, sir, you are going to have to work with what you get with the realization that it will never be enough but that reality simply dictates that that is the way it has to be. And it is going to be tougher under the budget constraints that we have.

So I wish you well. I think the demands that you will face at the VA are going to be as significant as those presented by any other

agency of the Federal Government. But you are well prepared for that. Your background, your experience, your expertise, your association personally with our new President, and of course your confidence in Secretary Jesse Brown should stand you well. I would also like to recognize that I think that we have been fortunate in the last four years to have had Mr. Tony Principi as Deputy Secretary and Acting Secretary. I can certainly speak for the veterans in my State who have a high regard for Mr. Principi, and I know that you will follow in his tradition of full commitment to all of our veterans. I would encourage you to have some very frank individual and collective discussions with the veterans' organizations relative to working arrangements, and relative to the contributions that they can make toward the necessary changes that are going to have to take place.

Again, I welcome your presence here as the nominee. I look forward to encouraging you at the earliest opportunity to visit the Pacific Northwest and, more specifically, Alaska, and would hope at that time to introduce you again to some of your friends, acquaintances, and fellow veterans.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this hearing, and dispatching this nominee to the appropriate position where he can serve our Nation's veterans further. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Murkowski appears on p. 26.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, Senator Murkowski.

I just want to second what you said about Tony Principi. I have said this before in this Committee, but I think he was absolutely first-class. In the very considerable debate that we had last year which then turned into something of a brawl and then went back toward debate and then became a solution about cuts for prescription drugs, Tony Principi was just extraordinary from his position, absolutely extraordinary. So I welcome the chance to work with John, Frank, and I will miss Tony very much.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. I have just been called down to the Foreign Relations Committee where we are going to have a vote on a nominee. Excuse me.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Certainly.

The distinguished Senator from South Dakota.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR DASCHLE

Senator DASCHLE. I would also associate myself with the remarks made by the Senator from Alaska and you, Mr. Chairman, on Tony Principi. I have had the good fortune of working with him on a number of occasions as well and found his access, his intellect, and his character to be the finest, and I appreciated having had the opportunity.

Mr. Gober, I want to congratulate you and welcome you to this Committee. It won't be the last opportunity to talk with you about the many issues that we will face over the next 4 years. I commend you for your commitment to veterans. I commend you for having the good sense to invite the two Senators from Arkansas to accompany you this morning. As the Chairman indicated, there are none in whom there is higher regard than the two Senators from Arkan-

sas. They are very dear friends of ours and we, as well as all other Senators, hold them both in very high regard.

I was thinking as they were speaking and in looking over the dais today, that we are all from rural areas—the two Senators from Arkansas, the Senator from Alaska, the Senator from West Virginia, and the Senator from South Dakota. It seems to me that as we look to one of the major challenges in the next couple of years relating to veterans affairs, it is to ensure that the quality of care for veterans in rural areas remain high; in fact, go higher than it is today. I am very concerned about that. I think many of the policies that have been articulated and formulated by the Administration in the past, frankly, are policies that may work well in urban areas but don't work so well in rural areas. We had an incredible fight last year with regard to maintaining the quality of care at one of the VA hospitals in southwestern South Dakota. Fortunately, as a result of hard work, we won that battle. But I must tell you there will be more battles in the future.

So if there is one role that I hope you, Mr. Gober, will play more than any other, it is the advocacy role for rural health care and rural veterans. It is extremely important. As I look to the balance that you provide Mr. Brown, he from Washington or having worked in the Washington area very successfully for many years, you, from outside Washington, working in a rural area, provide a balance that I think could be extraordinarily helpful as we try to deal with the compelling issues that we have to face in the next couple of years. So use your advocacy role; use it effectively.

Several years ago, Jay Rockefeller and I and everybody in this room voted to provide the Secretary of Veterans Affairs additional clout by bringing him to the table of the Cabinet for the first time. Our hope was that by being at the table, they could be aggressive, vocal advocates for veterans. I don't think being at the table necessarily is enough any more. I think it has to be someone who has the President's ear who can speak loudly and eloquently. And I am hopeful that given your special relationship with the President that you can be that kind of person. Be at the table, an advocate for veterans, but remember rural areas. If you do that, we are going to have a long-lasting and very successful and productive relationship and I look forward to it. Thank you for being here.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. No pressure on you, Mr. Gober. [Laughter.]

I would just make two announcements before I administer the oath to you. As I think everybody ought to know by this time, Jesse Brown has been sworn in and is now the Secretary. Second, the new Committee Member on the majority side of this Committee is Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell from Colorado. So that's good.

Hershel, if you would rise, please. Raise your right hand and repeat after me.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony that you will give at this hearing and any written answers or statements that you provide in connection with this confirmation process will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Mr. GOBER. I do.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, sir. We welcome your words.

TESTIMONY OF HERSEL W. GOBER, NOMINEE TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. GOBER. Thank you, sir. I have submitted a written statement for the statement record and if you don't mind, I'll just skip through it and hit the high points. Much of what I was going to say has already been said here this morning, so we are in agreement on those parts.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Murkowski, and Members of this Committee, I think you all know how tremendously honored I am to be the President's nominee for Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to President Clinton for placing his faith and confidence in me to carry out the duties and responsibilities of this important office. I would also like to thank the two Senators from the State of Arkansas for coming in and providing their support. We worked together very closely for many, many years on issues of concern to veterans in Arkansas and, indeed, in America.

This appointment also is a double honor for me because not only will I be serving President Clinton, but I get to work with my good friend Secretary Jesse Brown. Jesse and I have worked together on veterans' issues for many years and we are both veterans' advocates and we don't intend to change. We are now on the inside looking out rather than being on the outside looking in, however. We realize that sometimes when you look through the window, it is a little different when you are on the outside looking in.

I am sure that our relationship, the relationship that Secretary Brown and I have, will be strengthened over the years as we work during this very difficult time of fiscal restraints. I look forward to working with the dedicated people at the VA, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. They have some great people over there that want to do the job and I want to provide them the leadership, the support, the pat on the back, and the tools with which to do the jobs they should be doing. I know they will cooperate and look forward to doing that.

In his confirmation hearing 2 weeks ago, Secretary Brown stated that his tenure as Secretary of Veterans Affairs would be defined by his dedication to keeping the commitments made to this Nation's defenders. I want you to know I will support that. As Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs for the past 5 years, I have had an opportunity to see firsthand the tremendous impact that veterans' benefits and services can have on the lives of veterans and their families.

Increased demands are being placed on VA's health-care system. There is widespread agreement that the complex and confusing rules governing eligibility for VA medical care programs must be reformed. The highest quality of medical care for the greatest number of veterans must be on our agenda.

The country's veterans deserve the finest medical care this Nation can provide. VA has worked hard at establishing a quality medical program, but we must not rest on our laurels. During these fiscally austere times, difficult decisions will be made, but we must remain ever vigilant that quality health care for veterans is never compromised.

VA is responsible for administering a wide array of complex benefits and services in an era when there is not much money, and we recognize that fact. We are going to have to get the biggest bang for our bucks and put our money where it will do the most good and take care of the largest number of people we can. We have to be innovative and creative. We have to look for ways to make the system work better. I have seen it work out in the field and we have to do it. There are a lot of good solutions out there. There are a lot of good people who have ideas. I want to bring those people to the table. As Secretary Brown said, "Let's hear those ideas; let's work on this thing together."

I have a feeling that in America today—and I know from talking to the veterans' organizations, I know from talking to members of your staff, Senators, and over in the House, and in the VA—we are closer now to agreement that something must be done than we have ever been before. If we don't take this window of opportunity during this next 4 years, we have missed a great opportunity and it won't happen. We have got to do it. The time is critical. It has to be done now. The longer we wait the bigger the deficit becomes and the less health care we have. We must work together and do this. And I feel very heartened because I feel that attitude across America. And here in Washington, DC you can feel it.

Rural health care is a very critical thing. We must have equal access to health care. We have to figure out a way to do that for the people in rural areas and for women veterans. For too long we haven't looked into those things and done enough. We need to do that. We need to look at the homeless programs. We need to look at PTSD. All of those issues. I don't have the answers to them. If I had all those answers, I would be sitting at a different address than this one. I don't have that information to make those decisions. I don't have the solutions. But I can assure you this, I intend to do everything I can to make my years in Washington, DC a contribution to the Government and to the VA, a system that I know, a system that I've worked with, and a system that the veterans of America deserve and respect.

The VA is a good system. We train 60 percent of the medical people in this Nation through cooperation and affiliation with the universities of this country. It is a valuable program. It is a great natural resource. The President back last year was talking about when he does his national health-care program that the VA will play a large part in it. And that is as it should be. But we have a lot of things to do and we have a short time in which to do it. I want to be a part of it. I want to make whatever small contribution I can make because the veterans of America and the veterans of Arkansas are the ones who sent me here. I would not be sitting here were it not for their support. They are the ones that were behind me. They are the ones I work for and I will never forget that.

Having said that, I realize also that the veterans and I and Secretary Brown will not agree all the time. We can't do that because when everybody agrees all the time then only one person is thinking. I don't like that kind of atmosphere. I like for everybody to do their part and use their brain and let's come up with good ideas. But when we do disagree, I hope we can find a compromise. As you mentioned earlier, there are some things that have to be done in

America and in the VA. I look forward to being a part of this exciting time.

Before I close, I would like also to say that Tony Principi is one of my dearest friends. The respect that Tony enjoyed across America with America's veterans is legendary. I was delighted when Senator Murkowski said he would be coming to this Committee but I am also delighted that he is over with Senator Thurmond. He is a fine individual and he has done a great job for America's veterans.

I want to thank my family for coming. My wife, Olivia, she and I were childhood sweethearts, high school sweethearts. We have been married for 36 years and we have raised six wonderful children. I love her more today than I loved her when I married her. She is the one who has pushed me and always picks me up when I fall and always grabbed me and pulled me down to the ground when my feet get too high off the ground. [Laughter.]

We are from a small place in Arkansas called Possum Valley. We live on a farm 18 miles from town. It is the center of the universe as far as we're concerned and the Garden of Eden. That keeps my feet with rural America and those roots will never be dug up or pulled out. I will keep them there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing. I would like to thank your staff and the staff of the minority for the courtesy that they have shown me in preparation for it.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gober appears on p. 27.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you very much, Mr. Gober.

I find myself really agreeing with your premise, and that is that we really don't have much time. This is the beginning of a new era. We all want to believe that, and we also know deep in our hearts that we have got to solve some problems pretty quickly and we may not get another shot at it. That is particularly true when it comes to health care and the very delicate, very potentially sensitive question of how is it that there is, or is not, a relationship or interaction between national health-care reform and the VA system which is the largest health-care system in this country. We have, on the one hand, the VA as a Government-run system entirely; and, on the other hand, the one President Clinton will try to produce for the country which will be a job-based private health insurance system.

So to what extent will there be a relationship between those two systems? To what extent will veterans feel threatened by national health-care reform? To what extent will they feel threatened, but wrongly so, because we haven't communicated whatever interaction there might be in the right way? So I think these are very difficult times and it is going to call for high level skills in communication.

I also happen to agree with you that it is going to be hard. The VA is not an entitlement. Most citizens in this country when they think of the VA they assume it just gets a certain amount of money every year plus 3 or 4 percent, all kinds of increases that are just built in. It is not. It is a budget we have to fight over every single year. Secretary Brown's predecessor was incredible in being able to inject \$1 billion more per year for virtually each of the years that he was there. It never is enough. Which really leads me to my first question of you.

I had a particular project going on in my own office and in my own life which involved an enormous amount of work by people that work for me in my office here in Washington and also some of those who work for me in my Senate office in Charleston, West Virginia. I just feel so strongly about what they did that I want to get them together today and thank them and tell them they have made a lot of things possible that couldn't have happened otherwise. My staff is small. Yours is 250,000-plus people.

Every year is a fight for budget, every dollar does count. There is a shortage of nurses, there is a shortage of new equipment, there is a shortage of all kinds of things. There are things that I, as the new Chairman, and that you will want to do, and you mentioned several of them—PTSD, homeless, health care, rural matters, a lot. There are some very interesting things going on in medicine which I have observed which allow Vietnam veterans who have had this pent up anger, rage, guilt in them for 15 to 20 years—benefiting from alternative forms of medicine that aren't necessarily in the book of the American Medical Association—which have done some extraordinary things to release some of that hostility or that guilt or whatever it is and to make people then be able to function once again. Now we are finding that these feelings are not unique to veterans of Vietnam but also Korea and even World War II. There is so much we have to do and so few dollars with which to do it.

So my question is kind of a generic one, and that is, when you have got that many people, you have got to do part of your leadership work and make your organization work better by being good to them, by letting them know you appreciate what they do, as you said in your own testimony, giving them a "pat on the back." That's easy to do with a small staff like mine. It is going to be very hard to do with a larger staff like yours, 250,000-plus. So I am interested just frankly in that, the whole question of morale in the Department of Veterans Affairs all across this country.

You are going to be swamped. You will be new to your job, so will Secretary Jesse Brown. This whole question of getting out enough so that you can see people and let them know they are doing a good job. Where they are not doing a good job, obviously you and we will have to monitor that too. But the question of how you keep the morale of the VA high in times where a lot of people are going to feel very threatened because of the new Administration, changes in health care, fear about changes within the VA system which may have nothing to do with actually what is planned, but just concerns. I would like to hear the sort of way you deal with things like that as a human being.

Mr. GOBER. Thank you, Senator. It is a very important question. As you know from my prehearing questions, the problems I presented, that is one of the very big problems, the question of morale and leadership.

I had the hardest leadership job in the world in commanding a combat infantry company in Vietnam. Getting troops to charge into fire is a very difficult job; granted it is smaller. There is no way I can go out and pat everybody in the VA on the back. But that is what leaders are for.

One of my greatest strengths is I am an organizer. I am a staff coordinator. I am a chief of staff. I am an executive officer. I know

how to use a staff. I know how to get directives out. I know how to followup. I believe the old adage we have in the military: the only thing that gets done is what the commander checks. You have to have a way to have checks and balances. The style of leadership I like is for people to feel like we're associates. I am not the first one to have that from Arkansas. We had a man named Sam Walton who had that same philosophy. No one works for anybody; we all work for the veterans of this country. They are our bosses. They are the ones we really work for. We are given this job for a period of time and that has nothing to do with the chain of command. Our first obligation is to them.

I think we need to create an atmosphere where people feel like, hey, we are a part of this. My voice is heard. I am an employee down here but I've got a great idea. Use TQM, Total Quality Management, use all the tools that we've got because we are going to need every one of them. We don't have a tool that we don't need to use. We don't have a person in the VA, as President Clinton has said, we don't have a person in America to waste. We don't have a person in the VA to not use. We need to pull all of them in.

The way we do that is through the staff and through the chain of command. The chain of command must be encouraged to reward their workers. Tell them they are good. Every time it hits the news that something happened at a VA hospital, that small VA hospital affects the entire VA chain. Everybody right off the bat says, "Oh, the VA is no good. Let's do away with it." That's not true. It is a fine system. It has dedicated employees and it is a good system.

I know that Secretary Brown is very strong in leadership. My style is that I like to take the job very seriously but never take myself seriously. I like to create an atmosphere where people want to come to work, where people want to do their jobs. You can do that. It is a large agency but it can still be done. It has to be done and it can be by utilizing the people we have that work for us.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, Mr. Gober.

Senator SPECTER, I'm sorry I didn't notice that you came in. You did so so quietly that I was caught off guard. I obviously would welcome any comments you might have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SPECTER

Senator SPECTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to stop by to compliment you, Mr. Gober, on this nomination and to say that, notwithstanding only a few members, Friday is a tough day around here, we look forward to your confirmation. I have reviewed your record. It is an outstanding record.

You have a very tough job ahead of you. The Department of Veterans Affairs has enormous responsibilities and very, very limited resources. I think with Secretary Brown and you there it will be a good team but there is a tremendous job to do.

As the Chairman noted on responsibilities, to see them firsthand is very important. I hope that you will devote some time to travel. I hope that you will find a day or a half day to come to Pennsylvania during the course of this year. I served last year as Ranking Republican on this Committee and Senator Murkowski has taken that position in accordance with our seniority rules, but I have been very deeply involved in the Veterans' Affairs Committee in my

12-plus years in the Senate. I have a special concern because of my father who was a veteran of World War I and received very extensive care. He was injured in the war and carried shrapnel in his legs until the day he died. For a long period of time during the Depression days, the small pension check he got was the sole means of support.

We had one rather light moment during Secretary Brown's confirmation hearing when Senator Simpson was asking him about his net worth and then Secretary-designate Brown said that he thought that was the way America was supposed to be, earn money. When there was a lull in the action, Senator Rockefeller made a recommendation to Mr. Brown that he should inherit wealth, it was an easier course to follow. When there was another break, I said to Senator Rockefeller that I hoped he would include me on that list to inherit wealth, and perhaps you, too.

But this is a tough job. There are a lot of people out there who need a lot of help. It is a very, very tough job.

I note in your background that you were in the Marines and in the Army. You served both as a sergeant, a noncommissioned officer, and also as an officer and rose to the rank of major. You served a long time in total. When you reenlisted, why did you choose to go to the Army instead of the Marine Corps? [Laughter.]

That is a question that I am sure you've been asked more than once.

Mr. GOBER. I always have a story I tell my marine friends but I won't tell it here. [Laughter.]

But when I tried to go back in, at that time Olivia and I had two children and they would not take me back in the Marines because they said I had too many children to get back in, too many dependents. And then I went to the Army and this recruiting sergeant said we can't take you either. And I said, "Oh, yes you are. I am going in the Army." He said, "No, you will never be in the Army." So I went over and joined the Reserves and applied for extended active duty. When I went through OCS, I came back home and talked to that Army recruiter and I said, "See, I told you I would get back in." He said, "Yes, sir, you did." [Laughter.]

Senator SPECTER. That's good work. It leads to a lot of jesting. Our colleague Senator McCain, who was a famous Navy pilot, makes stories about the Marines and they end up, without going through the long version, they become a marine because their parents weren't married. [Laughter.]

Mr. GOBER. I wasn't going to say that, but that is what I tell the other guys.

Senator SPECTER. When President Reagan gave the oath of office to Secretary of State Shultz, a very impressive ceremony in the Rose Garden, similar to the ceremony going on today on the swearing-in of Cabinet officers, the Marines were touted very highly and there were quite a number—Don Regan was a marine. But there is a quality about all branches of the service. I was in the Air Force myself for 2 years. I served in the Office of Special Investigation.

But your record is a very good one. I look forward to working with you. My staff and I are available to help you in any way we can.

Mr. GOBER. Thank you, sir.

Senator SPECTER. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Thank you, Senator Specter.

Hershel, I can remember when I was Governor of West Virginia for 8 years, there is kind of a remoteness just in general that a Governor feels from the Federal Government. Governors talk about that all the time, whether with health-care policy or anything. I would assume that a Director of Veterans Affairs for a State has the same view toward the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington. I would be curious, when you were doing your work at the State level, what were some of your observations, criticisms, worries, ambitions about the VA in Washington?

Mr. GOBER. I think it is the same in all States. Veterans' organizations have it. But in the State Director's position, of course I represented all the 261,000 veterans in Arkansas, as the State Director in West Virginia does. That doesn't mean we handle their claims, but we are supposed to be their spokesman and their ombudsman and represent them.

The concern I have is the length of time it takes to process a VA claim. It is shameful. I know cases where veterans have filed their claims and they are sitting there, they have lost their home, their wife can't take the pressure so they get a divorce, the family breaks up, and then finally they get their check. It is too late then. He has lost his life, he has lost his morale, he has lost his will to do the things he needs to do. Now that is not a criticism of the VA people; it is just a fact that we have to look at the entire claims processing system and there has to be a way to speed it up, modernize it, push it through. There are a lot of reasons it occurs that way and we need to look at it and speed it up. It is just not satisfactory. It cannot be tolerated and we have got to do something to speed it up.

The health-care situation. To get in a VA hospital right now you almost have to have a Ph.D. to know whether you are qualified to get in or not. It is so complicated. How do you tell, particularly people in my area, we spend a lot of time explaining to them, "Well, you may get in or you may not." So that needs to be simplified.

Two of the greatest things the VA does is their State cemetery program. That's a great program, and the veterans' home program where the State and the Federal Government work together. In our State, it is a wonderful program and it is cheaper for the Federal Government, it is cheaper for the States, and they get quality care among their comrades.

So VA is doing some positive things but some of the things we've been doing we need to look at and see if we can speed it up. I know that is going to be one of Secretary Brown's priorities, to see if we can correct those things. There are a lot of things you can't change and a lot of things we won't be able to. But a veteran who is due entitlements should expect to receive those entitlements in a timely manner and we intend to look at doing that.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. You mentioned PTSD and homeless. Those are two areas that are emotional and very important to me as the new Chairman. Just reflect a little bit with me about your thoughts on those two problems.

Mr. GOBER. They both bother me a great deal. On the PTSD thing, I commented earlier that one good thing the Vietnam PTSD syndrome did is it woke America up to the fact that we had guys

walking the streets from World War II and Korea that had PTSD. So the Vietnam veterans deserve a great deal of credit for bringing it to the forefront. It is an illness and it needs to be treated. We need to do everything we can to help these people get back to their lives. It is a real issue.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. And it is not exclusive, we're learning, to Vietnam.

Mr. GOBER. No, it is not. It can happen from any traumatic experience. We need to do as much as we can on that to get the people who are suffering from this back into the mainstream and get their lives back together.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Are you willing to look at new ways of doing that? I want you to answer "yes."

Mr. GOBER. Yes. Yes, sir. [Laughter.]

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. I don't mean to stop things that we are doing, but to try new ways, alternative ways.

Mr. GOBER. Absolutely.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. I really believe in that. You can do a demonstration project and experimental projects in four or five different VA hospitals or whatever. You can do things. Sometimes people just don't want to start them because they are afraid that all of a sudden they will turn into a \$3 billion program or whatever. I like experimentation. I like looking for new ways to do things and I want you to, too.

Mr. GOBER. Secretary Brown and I have discussed this. We have to be innovative. I'm one of these people that if we need to do so and so, and you tell me, "Oh, no. We've been doing it this way for 20 years." To me, that is good enough reason right there to change it because we've been to the moon and back in 20 years. I don't buy the old thing of it has always been done this way. That's a cop out and that is the lazy way of wanting to do things. We want to be innovative.

On the homeless situation, I think it is atrocious that my comrades, who fought in Vietnam and were heroes, are laying out here on grates. I don't like it. It makes me very angry. I can't solve it but I think that America has to be bigger than that. We have to do more. We have to get them cleaned up, get them medically treated, get them jobs, and give them their dignity back. There are some great minds walking around the streets out here homeless.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. And we face some really difficult problems with some of the homeless. We have to be able to deal with that too.

Mr. GOBER. Yes, sir.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. I don't know of a bigger indictment of our country in fact, not that I want to do that, but for the fact that 25 percent of our homeless are veterans and 25 percent of them are children. That, to me, is just impossible to square with my concept of what America is.

Long-term care is interesting. During the Presidential campaign, President Clinton talked about long-term care usually at the end of a speech. There is a reason for that, of course, and that is that long-term care is more expensive than expanding access to health-care coverage, health insurance coverage. To provide universal long-term care in this country, if you do it in the right way, you

are talking 50, 60, 70 billion new dollars. Access to care on the non-VA side, you are talking \$30, \$40, \$50 billion. That's the way I look at it. I don't know how they are going to look at it from the White House, and that will be a very interesting test to see how serious in fact they are going to be about providing access to health-care coverage for everybody.

But reflect with me on your concerns about long-term care. VA has expertise, has academic and research expertise there that could be available. The incredible nature of the aging veterans population is that long-term care in this country is choosing not to deal with it. We're just kind of passing it off, putting people in nursing homes where things could be done at home, and just choosing somehow not to deal with it personally and in terms of Government responsibilities. Reflect with me on some of your concerns about long-term care and hopes.

Mr. GOBER. Senator, like a lot of people, the older I get the more interesting that subject becomes. I would hope, and I am sure it will be, a part of the discussion that the President, Secretary Brown, and all of us will have. It is very expensive but things like that don't go away. It is going to happen. Hopefully, if all of us are fortunate, we're going to live to enjoy that kind of treatment.

How it is going to play, how it is going to work, I have no idea, sir. I am sure it will be on the table.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Well it sure is going to have to be. It is part of what the VA system does. The question is, again, are there ways of experimenting, doing things in new ways that sometimes turn out to be less costly and more humane, more desirable for the veteran.

With respect to the VA and the Department of Labor. In one of your prehearing questions that I asked you, you said you felt the relationship between the VA and the Department of Labor was good. It is so important to our veterans, and especially our disabled veterans, that that relationship be good and mutually supporting. How would you go about defining or redefining some of the objectives in the relationship between the VA and the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service?

Mr. GOBER. I think that has to be a very close relationship. In Arkansas we have a very close relationship with the Employment Security Division, with the local veterans employment representatives, the disabled veterans' outreach program. We are very close. In fact, we do our annual conferences together so that the county service officers in each of the counties know what is going on in that area. They refer people to us who need help on entitlements; we refer people to them for employment help. It has worked very well there. Now realizing that this is a different arena, I would hope that we would develop that same type of relationship with the Veterans Employment Training Service.

We can take the veterans into the VA hospital and we can help their minds get straight and their bodies get straight, we can maybe even train them, but if we can't get them a job or get them back out there earning money, all we are going to do is repeat the process later. I would hope we could find a way to break that cycle. Secretary Brown and I have not talked specifically about how he intends to work with that, but I would hope that we would have

a meeting of the minds set on a talk to the Labor folks about veterans preference, about a lot of these issues that affect the veterans of America.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Yesterday, I spent some time listening to somebody who crystallized my thinking very uncomfortably. I kind of got into Government, Hershel, inadvertently. My father didn't like politics and didn't think that politics was an honorable profession. In fact, when my uncle Nelson Rockefeller was running for Governor the last time that he ran, my father refused to contribute a dime to his campaign. Believe me, my father was in a position to be able to do that. [Laughter.]

And he said, "You've become a politician," which I guess Nelson Rockefeller would have to say, "Well, that's my work." So this whole question of who we are and how we react and the dissatisfaction with Government, which is so widespread these days, now threatens to have a whole new dimension.

I got into Government because I went to West Virginia as a VISTA worker. I didn't have any intention of staying there but then couldn't leave; I fell in love with the people. I was in a town called Emmons, West Virginia for 2 years and I just loved it and I loved the people. So that my motivation in public life when I was working in State government and now here is helping people. If I see somebody that needs help, I want to help them. If I see a problem that needs to be solved, I want to help. If I see a problem that needs to be solved that costs a lot of money, I want to help. That's what gets me going.

Now we have got this new phenomenon called a \$300-plus billion budget deficit. Quite frankly, for a number of years I kind of wanted to pretend that it didn't exist. I am not an economist so that I could avoid that intellectually. I am at the point now where I can't because I am beginning to realize that the \$200 billion that we're paying on interest on the national debt is money that could be going to something in Possum Valley, Arkansas, or to Emmons, West Virginia, or to VA centers, or to training for research and development for technology, to all the things that we want and need to do in this country that affect people. So this sort of new phenomenon that in understanding we have a budget deficit and accepting it, is not amoral or inhumane, it is humane. Until you solve or begin to solve and get the right direction on reducing the budget deficit, what you are doing is just constantly eliminating opportunities to help other people because that money is just being paid to service the national debt.

I have learned that now and I don't like it. I don't like it at all. I am angry the deficit exists. I won't get into that, but it is a constraint and it goes back to the original point that I think both of us made. When we say we have got to work together—the veterans' organizations, the Congress, the executive branch, the VA—that we have got to work together as we never have before because it is a new era and it is not all good. We're up against it. If we don't come through on health care, which costs more money, we will never have another chance to do it again. We will be handed a British system where the Government does it all and there won't be any more choice of doctors and all the rest of it. You have got to spend money on that. Well, wait a second, I just said we don't have

money to spend, and then we have got to fight for money for the VA.

Philosophically, you understand what I am saying. You are here because you came from Possum Valley and you've worked hard all of your life. You've come up the hard way and your interest in doing this job come from your interest in people, just as that was the reason that motivated you to do your work in Arkansas. Any State Director takes plenty of criticism. You could have been doing a lot of other things, reading your name a lot less in the paper, not always favorably probably, but you do it because you want to help people. But here we have got this thing called a huge budget deficit and we can't escape it. Four years ago we kind of could, I felt, but you just can't do it now because eventually it just crushes everything else. And rather than having any hope of getting more money for the VA if we don't attack our budget deficit, the chances for getting even as much money for the VA begin to diminish.

So this is not just an intellectual torment but a real moral and human torment that you and I and Secretary Brown, and all the members of this Committee, both sides, have to face. Reflect on that a little bit for me.

Mr. GOBER. I think we are going to have to fight. I think we're going to have to state our case very strongly. Over the past decade, if everyone had conducted business like the VA the deficit wouldn't be quite so large because it has been basically straight line. Yes, there have been increases but they went for personnel costs. It basically did not go for the machinery they need to operate.

We all recognize it is going to be very tight. There are just so many dollars. I think we have to spend those dollars wisely. We have to look at every facet of the VA. If there is a program we need to modify that would help make a better program out of it, if there is a way that money can be used smarter, we need to do that. And I think we will have to be very tenacious on occasion. We will have to state our case, have our case together, and it is going to be very difficult.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. You are about where I am.

Mr. GOBER. You stated it so well.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. You are uncomfortable with it and you—

Mr. GOBER. I want to do more, but it is going to be difficult. That's why it is going to take some good minds. There are people in the VA, there are people on your staffs—

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Good minds and good will and understanding, right?

Mr. GOBER. That's right. The veterans' organizations and the veterans of this country understand. They are very intelligent and they understand that there is just so much money there. They may have ideas of things we can do. That's why I think Secretary Brown will use those minds and just lay it out on the table.

One thing that is so good about Jesse and I being together is that we both believe in the sunshine rule—let the sun shine in. Don't do anything in the back room. Let people be a part of it. Lou Holtz, before he went to Notre Dame, was the coach at Arkansas.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. You know where he was born, don't you? [Laughter.]

Mr. GOBER. Yes, sir. But Lou Holtz had a saying when he coached the Arkansas football team, it was the "Do Right Rule" and that's all he ever said, just "Do Right." And if you know you are doing the right thing, then you can shave yourself in the morning, you can go to bed at night and sleep, and you encourage the people around you to nudge you and say, hey, you are not doing right or if you do that you won't do right.

There has to be a solution. We have to do it, we have no other choice.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. We have no other choice.

I am going to submit some questions to you that I should have been asking you this morning but there are just other things on my mind. If you could get answers back to me and any other Committee Members that want to submit questions by Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. GOBER. I would be pleased to, sir.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. That's a full 6 days.

Mr. GOBER. No problem.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. One of the things I have really felt good about is that the veterans' organizations have virtually all said we know that times are tough. We know we have got to work together. This is going to be a new deal, a new Administration, and we're going to work this thing together. They are happy about Jesse Brown. They are going to be happy about you because I believe you are going to be confirmed. That's like me being happy about the spirit of cooperation in general when it comes to the budget and all the rest of it. I am always willing to talk about sacrifice but then somebody talks about doing something to something that is important to me in West Virginia and all of a sudden I turn purple.

My challenge is how do I defend the interests of my State on this Committee, with 217,000 veterans in West Virginia as compared to the 260,000 in Arkansas, when there are things I want to see happen for veterans and somebody tells me there isn't money for it or I have got to tell myself there isn't money for it? And then that whole relationship of how do we react and, more importantly, how do we communicate what it is we finally decide to do?

Several years ago the Congress passed I think one of the best laws it has ever passed and it was thrown right back in their face. It is called the Catastrophic Health Bill. Very controversial. I thought it was one of the best insurance deals to ever come down the pike for catastrophic health care for people. But we didn't sustain it, we didn't communicate well enough. Some senior groups got upset about it and all of a sudden we had to repeal it. In the Senate, there were 73 votes against total repeal. But the House repealed it and kept repealing it and finally we had to give way. The problem was we didn't explain what it was we were trying to do. I believe in communication so strongly and I think we're very bad at it generally in Government. We communicate with each other, executive and congressional, but we don't communicate with our constituencies, in this case the veterans of this country.

So I am coming back at you again with this business. Sunshine is not just doing things in the open. There is also a proactive aspect to sunshine or to rainfall. We have got to do things in a way which

makes veterans' organizations understand all the things that we can do because we are going to do things more effectively and more efficiently, but there will be some things that we can't do. We have got to be honest about that. We are going to hate it. We will suffer internally in our hearts and our consciences from this if it works out that way. But we are in that kind of an era, and so I am back to you once again to just get you to reflect on it.

Mr. GOBER. I agree totally about the communication. As we know, last year there was a very good example of lack of communication on a certain issue which I won't mention. I think you have to first of all be honest. Deal honestly with the people you serve and tell them, OK, this is what we've got. How are we going to spend it? What can we do? Can we do any more volunteer work at the hospitals? What can you do? How can you help us?

The ideal situation, as you said, is that we would have plenty of money to give to help repay the debt that America owes to its veterans. But we can never get enough money to do that, as Senator Murkowski said, to pay that debt. There is a lot of hurt out there and it bothers you and it bothers me because I am a caring person. I love people. People make me run. I want to help them. But we're not going to be able to do that. But I think if we do communicate properly, if we let them be a part of it, then they understand it. Once they understand, they will help you. And I think that is what we have to do. So I support your thesis that you have to have good communication with the people you serve, the people you work for.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. Senator Daschle mentioned that being at the table isn't enough, and I agree with that, but it sure is an important beginning. I will tell you what I told Secretary Brown, that when I met several weeks ago with then candidate Clinton and now President Clinton as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I told him that in the reform of health care on a national basis, where I am very active and working with him on that, that it was fundamental that veterans have a seat at that table. He agreed to that and pledged to that. I know that Oliver Meadows has already met with the Transition Team and that process will accelerate and continue.

We can work to see how this reform process goes on, on the one hand, for something called the country and yet that the VA health-care system is kept in tact in the way that it ought to be to meet the needs of the veterans. There is going to be some complicated fallout from all of this because if and when we choose, and I believe we will, to do health-care reform, I think we have got to face the fact there are going to be a number of veterans who up to this point have been going to VA hospitals who will start going to other hospitals. I have no idea what the consequence of that is going to be. I have no idea if that is going to happen or to what extent it is going to happen. But there is going to be a fallout from this and neither you nor I at this point know what it is going to be.

But that is a classic example of where we have to work very, very closely with the veterans in this country. Veterans feel like they are not listened to, I think. Even though you and I might argue that we feel we do listen to them and that you've spent a lifetime doing that, they feel like they are not listened to enough. And sometimes they are listened to but it is in kind of a perfunc-

tory manner; therefore, their feelings have been heard, their ideas have been heard, but maybe the sense that they were heard wasn't there, which is actually just as important as if what they said wasn't heard at all.

So this whole question of health-care reform is uncharted waters, absolutely never been done in the 200 or so year history of our health-care system. We have a very well established veterans health-care system which has its faults but which works strenuously to provide health care and has research going on in areas that other parts of the Federal Government aren't doing at all—spinal cord, aging process, all kinds of things. It is going to be a tough process, Hershel.

I have heard from you what I wanted to hear this morning. I wanted to gain a sense of you the person, where you're coming from, what motivates you, and I feel that I've done that. I've got technical questions that I can ask you but I can submit those and you can respond to those on paper. As far as I'm concerned, I like what I've heard. I liked what I heard when you came to see me in my office. I thought you were better here today, which is a good sign because it means the more pressure, the better you do. [Laughter.]

And nomination hearings are attracting some attention in town these days, as you no doubt were aware of that. So I like what I've heard.

I think the feeling around this table is very, very good, very positive. So you know you've got my support. I told you that before. I am prejudiced because I had an uncle who was Governor of Arkansas. As I told Dale Bumpers, we're such a nice family that we offered him up for Dale Bumpers to beat. [Laughter.]

If we hadn't done that you see, Dale Bumpers would still be practicing law in Charleston, Arkansas, a town of about 1,500 people. I'm joking of course. But I like what I hear and I am tremendously concerned about the need for us to work closely together and with the veterans' organizations, with veterans all across this country, face up to some of the tough decisions, do so in a way which is correct and right, and then communicate what it is not that we have done but that what we're contemplating, thinking about doing before. Share, learn, hear, and then the communication process afterwards.

The other thing, and I will close on this, is I really am concerned and want people who work for the VA to have the highest possible morale. There is so much we can do on salaries. There is so much we can do on hiring new people, buying new equipment, and there is so much that we can't do. You and Secretary Brown I think have an enormous obligation, and I feel it myself, to speak positively of the work they do, to pat them on the back. On the other hand, I think this Committee has to be a lot more aggressive on oversight than it has been in the past. Where problems develop, I think we have got to be very quick to target those problems and not lag and not wait until the pressure for us to do so builds. But do it early and yet do it in a way, such as you said, that we don't sort of trash the whole system. That is one of the arts and sciences of governing, which you know very well about.

I have really talked a lot more than you have, which is not what I intended to do, but I have liked everything that you have said. Unless you have anything more than you would like to add, Hershel——

Mr. GOBER. No, Senator, except I would like to thank you again for the courtesy shown. I have enjoyed it. I have learned a lot. It is always a pleasure to be among people who know the subject, and this Committee of course knows the subject very well. I look forward to working with this Committee. I will have no secrets. I don't operate that way. We have to have the open communication. We have to solve the problem. Thank you, sir.

Chairman ROCKEFELLER. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:33 p.m., the Committee adjourned, to reconvene at the call of the Chair.]

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV

Good morning. This is a hearing to consider the nomination of Hershel Gober to be the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Hershel, it is a great pleasure to have you here and I extend a warm welcome to you, your wife, Olivia, your daughter, Elizabeth, and the other fancy members and friends who join you today. Thank you all for coming. Also, Hershel, I congratulate you on your nomination as Deputy Secretary. You have a wonderful opportunity to share the hard work and service you have given to the veterans of Arkansas with the veterans of the entire Nation.

Hershel Gober understands the obligations that we hold to those who served this country, both in times of war and in times of peace. First in the Marine Corps, followed by a distinguished 17-year career in the Army, Hershel served with honor and dignity as is recognized by his many military decorations, including the Bronze Star and Purple Heart which he received during service in Vietnam.

Upon Hershel's return to his home State of Arkansas in 1983, he committed himself to protecting and supporting veterans' benefits. His work as the Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs earned him the respect of his colleagues and, in 1992, the award as the most effective State director from the National Association of State Directors.

Hershel, President Clinton has shown great confidence in you, your work, and your commitment to veterans by nominating you to serve in this important position. You bring to the VA a unique and valuable perspective on the relationship between State Departments of Veterans Affairs and the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs. Such a perspective should assist you in building a closer partnership around sharing responsibilities and providing services more effectively to veterans. Also, your close working relationship with the new President and Secretary Jesse Brown should ensure that the voice of America's veterans will be heard clearly throughout the Administration. I look forward to a timely meeting of this Committee to act on Hershel's nomination so as to allow Hershel and Jesse the opportunity to put together a first-rate team at the VA.

In closing, I note that Hershel Gober has completed the Committee Questionnaire for Presidential Nominees and responded to my pre-hearing questions, all of which will appear in the Record. Also included will be a letter from the Office of Government Ethics acknowledging that he is in compliance with laws and regulations governing conflicts of interests. I have reviewed the FBI report on Hershel and find no bar to his confirmation. In the process of reviewing background materials, Hershel, members of the Committee staff even had the pleasure of reading many of your songs written during the Vietnam War.

I look forward to hearing your testimony and to working with you in the near future.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR DALE BUMPERS

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to introduce to the Committee my friend and fellow Arkansan, Hershel Gober of Monticello, Arkansas, who has been nominated by the President to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Hershel Gober is a dedicated and talented public servant who has served as the Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs since 1988. In his capacity as Director he supervises over 200 people, who are serving the needs of Arkansas' 261,871 veterans and their families. He is intimately familiar with the workings of the Department of Veterans Affairs and has extensive knowledge of its programs and services. In addition, as a member of the Governor's Task Force on Veterans Affairs and the POW/MIA Verification Committee, he has worked closely with rep-

representatives of all the major veterans' service organizations and has a deep understanding of the issues that are of paramount concern to veterans.

His military career included seventeen years in the U.S. Army, including a three year tour in Vietnam. In 1969 while serving in Vietnam he was wounded in action while commander of an infantry company. He has received numerous military decorations for his bravery and patriotism, including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will face many difficult challenges in the next few years. An aging veterans population and limited financial resources will severely test the Agency. The course it charts now and the priorities it sets will determine its survival. I believe Hershel Gober's commitment, leadership and drive will help strengthen and improve the Agency and guarantee its survival into the 21st century.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR FRANK H. MURKOWSKI

Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your introduction. And good morning to you, Mr. Gober. I welcome you to these hearings.

I also want to recognize and welcome members of your family who are present. As I understand it, your wife, Olivia, is here with us today. I also understand that your daughter, Elizabeth Derryberry (who was born at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska) accompanied by her husband, Bobby, is also present. I welcome you all, and I ask that you, and any other members of Mr. Gober's family who are present stand.

It is a pleasure to see you again. And it is a particular pleasure to see you in this setting—as the prospective nominee to the important post of Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

From everything I have seen, I have no doubt that you are qualified for this important post.

You have served the nation as both a Marine, and as an Army Infantry officer. You have served the veterans of the State of Arkansas as the Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, and through your active participation in the activities of veterans' service organizations in Arkansas. I believe you will serve the nation's veterans with distinction as the Deputy Secretary of VA.

I must add, as well, that I am heartened to consider the nomination of a person who spent number of years in my home State, Alaska, attending college and working.

As I told you when we spoke informally, I look forward to seeing in VA's upper echelons a person who has first-hand understanding of Alaska, and first-hand knowledge of its geography, its climate, and, most importantly, its people. I hope you will visit Alaska soon, and join me in addressing the unique concerns of our veterans.

We have been fortunate in the past four years to have had Tony Principi serve as Deputy Secretary. Alaska's veterans have a high regard for Tony, and I know that you will follow in his strong tradition of commitment to all veterans.

Again, I welcome you today, and I look forward to hearing your statement.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to join you in welcoming Mr. Gober and his family here today as we consider his nomination to be Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Gober, your background leads me to believe that you are a fine choice to serve as the second-highest official of the second largest agency of the Federal government. You also come highly recommended by Mr. Larry Lee, the director of the Hawaii Office of Veterans Services, a sister organization to the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs which you so recently headed. Larry has faxed me numerous messages of support for your nomination, referring to you as a mentor who has been extremely helpful to the veterans of the Aloha State.

Mr. Gober, I see that you have many things in common with your future boss, Secretary Brown: you are both wounded, Vietnam combat veterans and each of you, as veterans advocates, possesses first-hand knowledge of the difficulties faced by ordinary veterans who seek assistance from VA. I think these similarities will ensure that you and the new Secretary will be able to work closely as a team.

I also believe that you bring important qualities and talents to the Deputy Secretary position that will complement those of Secretary Brown. The most important of these is that you are not a Washingtonian. By definition you bring an outside-

the-beltway perspective to an agency that too often looks inward for guidance. I hope that your presence on the executive floor will serve as a reminder to the bureaucrats who run the agency that VA's mission is to serve all veterans, regardless of race, gender, place of residence, or era of service.

Indeed, as a man who has represented the interests of Arkansas' rural veterans for the last five years, you will be expected to heighten VA's sensitivity to the needs of ordinary veterans in all their diversity, whether they live in the inner city, the suburbs, rural areas, or reservations; whether they live in Anchorage or Miami, Providence or Honolulu; whether they are white, African-American, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic; whether they are male or female; or whether they served in the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam, or other conflict. As your once and future boss, President Clinton, has so often stated, America's strength is truly its diversity.

In this regard, I would expect you to remember that there is no single equation or formula applicable to all veterans, that a sense of compassion for those who wore the uniform is more important than the strict and sterile implementation of laws and regulations that govern Title 38 services and benefits; in other words, give your charges the benefit of the doubt. In managing the Department, remember that efficiency should never come at the expense of the dignity and well-being of the Nation's veterans.

Thank you, Mr. Gober. I wish you well in your new position.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me this time. I fully intend to support Mr. Gober's nomination.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALAN K. SIMPSON

Mr. Chairman, I am most pleased to be here today for this important hearing for Mr. Hershel Gober to be the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

I met with Mr. Gober recently and I am very impressed by his sincerity, his qualifications and his compassion and concern for our Nation's deserving veterans.

I have reviewed the files and questionnaire regarding Mr. Gober's background and I see nothing at all that will preclude him from honorably serving in this position.

I do very much look forward to working with Mr. Gober and with the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown, for the betterment of all deserving veterans.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HERSHEL W. GOBER, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS—DESIGNATE

Mr. Chairman, Senator Murkowski, Members of the Committee, I am tremendously honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for the position of Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I would like to express my gratitude to President Clinton for placing his faith and confidence in me to carry out the duties and responsibilities of this very important office.

This appointment is a double honor for me in that, not only have I been afforded this opportunity to serve but also that I am privileged to serve with my good friend Jesse Brown.

Secretary Brown and I have worked together on veterans issues for several years and have established a good working relationship and a close personal rapport. This relationship, I am sure, will be strengthened with time and will work to the advantage of America's veterans.

In his confirmation hearing before this Committee just two weeks ago, Secretary Brown stated that his tenure as Secretary of Veterans Affairs would be defined by his dedication to keeping the commitments made to this nation's defenders. I share this dedication and pledge to you that I will be an advocate for veterans programs within the Executive Branch and with the Congress.

As Director of Arkansas' Department of Veterans Affairs for the past five years, I have had an opportunity to see firsthand the tremendous impact that veterans' benefits and services can have on the lives of veterans and their families. I have also had an opportunity to work with many of the dedicated and conscientious employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs and I look forward to expanding and enhancing that relationship as Deputy Secretary.

The VA's health care delivery system represents the largest medical care network in the country. VA operates 171 hospitals, more than 360 outpatient, outreach and community centers and 126 nursing homes. This translates into nearly 100,000 hospital beds including medical, surgical, psychiatric and nursing home beds. The Department also operates 196 centers providing special counseling for those suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

VA medical research, funded at \$227 million in outlays in FY 1992, focuses on the AIDS virus, prosthetic devices, spinal cord injuries, and other health problems, such as drug and alcohol addiction, and Alzheimer's disease. The benefits provided by VA's medical research program reach far beyond veterans treated at VA medical facilities.

In a similar fashion, VA's unique relationship with our nation's medical schools has contributed to the health and well-being of all Americans by providing education and clinical training for more than half of our nation's doctors and numerous other allied health care professionals.

Yes, the VA has been a true national resource because of its foundation of caring and commitment, but it is now a resource that faces the very formidable challenge to change and adapt.

Increased demands are being placed on VA's health care system. There is widespread agreement that the complex and confusing rules governing eligibility for VA's medical care programs must be reformed. The highest quality of medical care for the greatest number of veterans must be our agenda.

This country's veterans deserve the finest medical care this nation can provide. The VA has worked hard at establishing a quality medical program. But we cannot rest on our laurels. During these fiscally austere times difficult decisions will be made, but we must remain ever vigilant that quality health care for veterans is never compromised.

The continued success of VA's compensation, pension, education and home loan guaranty programs are being jeopardized by our inability to process veterans' claims for benefits in a timely manner. The necessary operational enhancements must be implemented to provide veterans and their dependents with a fair, impartial and expeditious adjudication of their claims.

VA is responsible for administering a wide array of complex benefits and services in an era of scarce financial resources. Funding is limited and precious. We must allocate money wisely and use it as effectively as possible. We must be clear in our objectives and conduct an intensive review of all of our administrative systems.

General George Patton once said that "wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men." The memory of those who fought for freedom demands that we make every effort to address their problems. We cannot, and shall not, abrogate our responsibilities to these men and women.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with the Congress on these and other challenges that lie ahead. I give you and this Committee my personal commitment that I will do everything in my power to ensure that America continues to meet its obligation to those who have served in our nation's Armed Services. I also want to assure the Committee that we are prepared to make the tough decisions and that we will look for every way possible to get more for our money in these times of budget deficits.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Senator Bumpers and Senator Pryor for their appearance on my behalf. I also wish to thank all of those who have supported me for this nomination, and thank the Committee staff for their courtesy and professionalism as we prepared for this hearing.

Most of all, my thanks and my love to my wife, Olivia. The understanding and support for my career that she has shown for over 36 years is the foundation for all that we have accomplished, and for all that we hope to do in the future.

And, I cannot close without thanking the veterans of Arkansas and, indeed, America for their support and encouragement.

Mr. Chairman, I will be pleased to answer any questions you or any of the Members might have.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES

PART I: ALL THE INFORMATION IN THIS PART WILL BE MADE PUBLIC

1 Name GOBER Hershel Wayne
(LAST) (FIRST) (OTHER)

2 Present address 700 E. 9th St., Apt 9E Little Rock, AR 72202
(CITY) (STATE) (ZIP CODE)

3 Position to which Deputy Secretary U.S. 4 Date of
 nominated Dept. of Veterans Affairs nomination Dec 17, 1992

5 Date of birth 21 Dec 1936 6 Place of birth Monticello, Arkansas
(DAY) (MONTH) (YEAR)

7 Marital status Married 8 Full name of spouse Denver Olivia (DeArmond) Gober

9 Names and ages of children

<u>Curtis - 35</u>	<u>Christopher - 26</u>
<u>Hershel - 32</u>	<u>Laura - 25</u>
<u>James - 31</u>	<u>Elizabeth - 20</u>

10 Education

<small>(Institution including city and State)</small>	<small>Dates attended</small>	<small>Degrees received</small>	<small>Dates of degrees</small>
<u>Alaska Methodist Univ.</u>			
<u>Anchorage, Alaska</u>	<u>1972-1975</u>	<u>BA (Cum Laude)</u>	<u>June 75</u>
<u>Univ. of Maryland</u>			
<u>Worms, Germany</u>	<u>1963-64</u>	<u>None</u>	
<u>American Univ.</u>			
<u>Ft. Benning, GA</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>None</u>	
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

11 Honors and awards

List below all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, military medals, honorary society memberships, and any other special recognitions for outstanding service or achievement.

Military: Soldiers Medal, Bronze Star, Purple Heart,

Meritorious Service Medal, USMC Good Conduct, Vietnamese

Cross of Gallantry, Civic Action Medal, Vietnamese Honor

Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Army Commendation Medal,

Combat Infantryman's Badge, Parachutist Badge. 1970

Jaycees Outstanding Young Men of America. 1992-voted

most effective State, Director of Veterans Affairs.

- 12 Memberships List below all memberships and offices held in professional, fraternal, business, scholarly, civic, charitable, and other organizations for the last 5 years and any other prior memberships or offices you consider relevant

Organization	Office held (if any)	Dates
<u>The American Legion</u>	<u>Department Adjutant</u>	<u>85-87</u>
<u>The American Legion</u>	<u>Dept. Service Off.</u>	<u>88-current</u>
<u>Veterans of Foreign Wars</u>		
<u>Disabled American Vets.</u>		
<u>Military Ord. Purple Heart</u>		
<u>AMVETS</u>		

- 13 Employment record

List below all employment (except military service) since your twenty-first birthday, including the title or description of job, name of employer, location of work, and inclusive dates of employment

1/59-4/59: Shipping Clerk, A-1 Records, Oklahoma City, OK
4/59-3/61: Clerk/Switchman, Missouri Pac. Railroad, McGehee, AR
3/61-10/61: Supervisor, DeArmond Housemoving, Dermott, AR
11/78-3/83: Director, Permits, Rights of Way and Land
Acquisition, NW Alaskan Pipeline Co, Fairbanks, Alaska
8/83-8/85: Senior Instructor, JROTC, Warren HS, Warren, AR
8/85-12/87: State Adjutant/Director, The American Legion and
Ark. Vet. Child Welfare Agency, Little Rock, AR
1/88-Current: Director, AR Dept. of Vet. Affairs, Little Rock, AR

14 Military service List below all military service (including reserve components and National Guard or Air National Guard) with inclusive dates of service, rank, permanent duty stations and units of assignment, titles, descriptions of assignments, and type of discharge

1/56-1/59: USMC, Sergeant, Camp Pendleton, CA; Okla City, OK
Rifleman, Clerk and Recruiting Sergeant.
10/61-10/78: USA, Major, Infantry, Germany, Vietnam, Wisconsin,
Georgia, California. Commanded Platoon, Company and Brigade
size unit. Staff at Battalion, Brigade and Division Level
At Fort Polk, La was the Asst G3 (Operation) for the Div.
Honorably retired on October 31, 1978.

15 Government
experience

List any advisory, consultative, honorary, or other part-time service or positions with Federal, State, or local governments other than those listed above.

None

16 Published
writings

List the titles, publishers, and dates of books, articles, reports, or other published material you have written.

I write a column for the Arkansas Legionnaire Newspaper.
During the Vietnam War I wrote and recorded numerous
patriotic folksongs, which are available in the Library
of Congress.

17 Political
affiliations
and activities

(a) List all memberships and offices held in and financial contributions and services rendered to any political party or election committee during the last 10 years.

I belong to no organizations. I have contributed to
the Democratic Party and Candidates. During the just
completed Presidential Campaign I served (volunteer)
as President-Elect Bill Clinton's National Campaign
Manager for Veterans' Affairs.

(b) List all elective public offices for which you have been a candidate and the month and year of each election involved.

None

18 Future
employment
relationships

- (a) State whether you will sever all connections with your present employer, business firm, association, or organization if you are confirmed by the Senate.

YES

- (b) State whether you have any plans after completing Government service to resume employment, affiliation, or practice with your previous employer, business firm, association, or organization.

NO PLANS

- (c) What commitments, if any, have been made to you for employment after you leave Federal service?

NONE

- (d) (If appointed for a term of specified duration) Do you intend to serve the full term for which you have been appointed?

YES

- (e) (If appointed for an indefinite period) Do you intend to serve until the next Presidential election?

YES

19 Potential
conflicts
of interest

- (a) Describe any financial arrangements, deferred compensation agreements, or other continuing financial, business, or professional dealings which you have with business associates, clients, or customers who will be affected by policies which you will influence in the position to which you have been nominated.

NONE

- (b) List any investments, obligations, liabilities, or other financial relationships which constitute potential conflicts of interest with the position to which you have been nominated.

NONE

- (c) Describe any business relationship, dealing, or financial transaction which you have had during the last 5 years whether for yourself, on behalf of a client, or acting as an agent that constitutes a potential conflict of interest with the position to which you have been nominated

NONE

- (d) Describe any lobbying activity during the past 10 years in which you have engaged for the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing the passage, defeat, or modification of any Federal legislation or for the purpose of affecting the administration and execution of Federal law or policy

I have as the State Director of Veterans Affairs and as a service officer, contacted elected officials to voice opinions on pending legislation or current legislation of concern to the veterans of the state of Arkansas.

- (e) Explain how you will resolve any potential conflict of interest that may be disclosed by your responses to the above items. (Please provide a copy of any trust or other agreements involved.)

I will not hold any office in any veteran organization.

20 Testifying
before the
Congress

- (a) Do you agree to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Congress upon the request of such committee?

YES

- (b) Do you agree to provide such information as is requested by such a committee?

YES

HERSHEL W. GOBER

Military Service:

Hershel served a three year tour in the Marine Corps, was a member of the Army Reserve and retired as a Major after serving seventeen years in the U.S. Army. This service included two tours in Vietnam.

His military decorations include the Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Service and Commendation medals, numerous Vietnam awards and medals and the Combat Infantryman and Parachutist Badges.

Employment:

Five years in Alaska as a supervisor and director for the Northwest Alaska Pipeline Corporation primarily involved in land acquisition.

Two years as Senior Instructor, Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps, Warren High School.

Nearly two years as Department Adjutant, The American Legion, Department of Arkansas and, concurrently, Director, Arkansas Veterans Child Welfare Service.

Appointed Director, Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs by then Governor Bill Clinton on January 1, 1988.

Nominated as Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to take office with President Clinton in January 1993.

Veterans Advocacy:

Member of numerous veterans organizations to include The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, The Marine Corps League and AMVETS.

Active role in all veterans concerns through extensive travel and speaking engagements. He has had a constant dual theme. Assistance to those in need and publicizing those benefits which were being reduced, and obtaining grass roots support for actions which would protect veterans entitlement.

Strong support of the Arkansas County Veterans Service Officer program, their professional development and a recent initiative which raised the state matching funds allocated to each county.

A Veterans Assistance Program which was a targeted special program to selected low income counties designed to reach every possible beneficiary.

Maintenance of professional standards at the Arkansas Veterans Home, a domiciliary and intermediate care nursing facility. Through his relationship with veterans organizations he made resident quality of life a special concern and made numerous improvements in both the physical facility and in resident programs.

Ancillary programs include the Flag Education Program which provided flag education to over 75,000 fifth grade students over a three year period. Taught by volunteers, veterans and auxiliary members, it has been adopted in other states.

Co-chairman of the Operation Welcome Home celebration which honored those who fought in the Persian Gulf, and veterans of all conflicts. It included a large parade, ceremony and entertainment at State Capitol. With over 7,000 participants in the parade, and over 100,000 along the route it was the largest such event ever held in Arkansas and was a successful demonstration of his organizational abilities and the volunteer support which he was able to obtain.

Personal:

Hershel and his wife Olivia are residents of Monticello, Arkansas where Hershel was born in 1936. They have raised six children.

Hershel attended public schools in Arkansas and received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Alaska Methodist University in Anchorage, Alaska in 1975.

On September 13, 1992, Hershel was honored by the National Association of State Directors with the Melvin T. Dixon Award. Presented annually, this award recognizes the state director whom the association members judge to be their most effective director.

Hershel, with his enlisted and officer status in the Marine Corps and Army, is uniquely qualified to speak to veterans issues, and well understands the basis of their entitlements. This, with his concern, ensures that every legitimate veterans issue will be fought for, and that the cause of every veteran will be known.

AFFIDAVIT

Hershel W. Gober, being duly sworn, hereby states that he/she has read and signed the answers to the foregoing Questionnaire for Presidential Nominees and that the information provided therein is, to the best of his/her knowledge and belief, current, accurate, and complete.


Signature of Nominee

Signature of Nominee _____

Subscribed and sworn before me this 23rd day of December, 1992

Barbara S. Bryant
Notary Public

Notary Public

My Commission Expires 7-1-08



United States

Office of Government EthicsSuite 500, 1201 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005-3917

JAN 19 1993

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Mr. Hershel W. Gober. President-elect Clinton has announced his intent to nominate Mr. Gober for the position of Deputy Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs.

We have reviewed the report and have also obtained advice from the Department of Veterans' Affairs concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties.

Based thereon, we believe that Mr. Gober is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Potts
Stephen D. Potts
Director

Enclosure

WRITTEN PRE-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN ROCKEFELLER TO
DEPUTY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE HERSHEL W. GOBER AND THE RE-
SPONSES

Question 1. I believe that the cost of veterans benefits is a continuing cost of providing for our Nation's defense. What are your thoughts on the relationship between spending and our national security, on the one hand, and the cost of veterans benefits, on the other?

Question 2. Do you believe that the faithfulness with which the Federal government keeps its commitments to veterans through the maintenance of high quality programs of veterans benefits and services has an impact on the attitudes of our Nation's young men and women toward service in the Armed Forces?

Answer 1 and 2. The programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA-VA) represent the fulfillment of this Nation's obligations, and its contract, with those who have given of themselves to the defense of our Nation and our ideals. Our honor is our bond . . . when we carry through with our commitments to previous generations of veterans we also say to current and future generations of military personnel that we will afford them the same levels of help, dignity and honor. This Nation has proven the effectiveness of an all-volunteer force . . . we can and must encourage willing service by proving that such service will never be forgotten.

Question 3. Please describe the working relationship you hope to establish with Secretary-designate Jesse Brown if both of you are confirmed.

Answer. Mr. Brown and I have been friends for several years. We are both Service Officers. He will receive my full support, my strongest efforts, and my best advice. We share a commitment to the same goals and, thus, any differences in our views or styles would merely serve to enhance the probability of finding the most correct methods of dealing with any situation.

Question 4. How would you describe the management philosophy you would employ in discharging your duties as Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs?

Answer. Lou Holtz, the current football coach at Notre Dame and a former Arkansas coach, says he has only one rule for his players . . . he calls it the "Do Right" rule and it is self-explanatory. My management philosophy is and will continue to be that I will always attempt to do what is right for the constituents of the Department and for the Nation, and I would expect nothing less from those who serve with me. I will expect a maximum effort from my staff which includes being sure enough of their own correctness to be willing to tell me when I've failed to "Do Right".

Question 5. What role do you anticipate playing in selecting the nominees for other Presidential appointees in the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Answer. I feel certain that Mr. Brown will consult me, because like him I know so many of the active participants in service to veterans. Thus, I would be able to use this knowledge to help insure that the individuals selected would be wholly compatible with the organization that Secretary-designate Brown will build.

Question 6. Coming from a State Department of Veterans Affairs as you do, you have a special perspective on what an effective and proper relationship between the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs and State Departments of Veterans Affairs should be.

Answer. Ideally, it should be the relationship we have experienced in Arkansas . . . a cooperative interaction between professional entities who share the common goal of serving America's veterans, their families or survivors.

Question 6A. From your experience, which elements of the current Federal-State relationship on veterans matters are working appropriately and which should be modified or discarded?

Answer. Again, the relationship as I have experienced it is good . . . we need to keep, encourage, and expand that relationship . . . what needs to be discarded is any trend which develops toward an adversary relationship . . . an attitude which I find unacceptable.

Question 6B. I note that Arkansas has a State Veterans Home. What is your view of the relationship between VA and the State Home program?

Answer. In Arkansas the VA has been a good supporter of the Arkansas Veterans Home. They provide any advice and support we ask for. In my opinion, the Veterans Home program is one of the best administered programs the VA has.

Question 6C. Do you anticipate assuming a special responsibility for establishing and maintaining relationships with the various State Departments of Veterans Affairs, especially in terms of keeping these entities regularly advised regarding significant developments within the VA and affecting the VA?

Answer. I will assume any responsibilities Mr. Brown asks me to. Mr. Brown and I believe in open communication. Having served as a state director I do enjoy a spe-

cial relationship and also a special responsibility. One of the easiest, yet often overlooked, trouble eliminating tactics is open communication. This allows the exchange of good and bad news and more importantly lets more people in on problem solving. Anticipated reforms, changes, etc. should be discussed and input obtained from the veterans we serve.

Question 7. What are the five most significant changes you believe should be made in VA programs?

Answer. (1) **ELIGIBILITY REFORM:** Medical treatment programs must be clarified and strengthened. The current system of multiple levels of eligibility, multiple levels of priority, and multiple levels of accountability must be simplified. The highest quality of medical care for the maximum number of veterans should be our agenda. The elements of administration which slow or block necessary health care must be examined carefully.

(2) **VETERANS CLAIMS:** The current system negates quality by demanding volume regardless of quality . . . effectively. This system is driving itself and going nowhere . . . cases must be readjudicated a second time in order to correct unnecessary errors which could have been avoided . . . approximately 45% of all cases sent to the Board of Veterans Appeals are remanded because of the failure of a regional office to take proper action . . . we must encourage excellence. Concurrently, we must insure adequate staffing of the most critical areas of the benefits process . . . we should not allow ancillary staff to grow at the expense of adjudication and counseling . . . we must reallocate existing staff to insure that the core programs of the Department are maximized.

(3) **EDUCATION:** The education programs need to be examined with an eye toward developing some long range program which will exhibit a stability and orderliness not currently found in our current chaotic amalgam of multiple programs and entitlements. Strong emphasis should be continued on vocational rehabilitation for the disabled.

(4) **ADMINISTRATION:** Examination of the administrative requirements of each program the VA administers. The current requirements in many cases are redundant, time consuming and frustrating to both the VA personnel, service officers and more importantly to the veterans the VA serves. The system requires streamlining as much as possible. This will decrease the processing time of claims and other administrative actions.

(5) **LEADERSHIP/MORALE:** While not a change in programs I believe this issue is important. Over the last several years the VA has received negative publicity on numerous occasions. Realizing that an agency as large as the VA can never eliminate all adverse publicity, something can be and must be done to focus on the many positive aspects of the VA.

Whenever one VA hospital receives negative publicity or a story reaches the news media regarding a claim that takes an excessive amount of time to process, or a VA employee acts in an unprofessional manner toward a veteran, it affects the entire VA system in a negative manner. Morale of the employees suffer because they are all judged by the negatives and the positives are forgotten. The VA employees must take pride in their work and receive the leadership that will urge them to excel. The vast majority of VA employees are dedicated, caring professional people. They need positive reinforcement and encouragement to voice their opinions, suggestions and recommendations on how to better serve the people we all work for—America's veterans.

Question 8. As Deputy Secretary, what do you plan to do in order to encourage open communications between VA employees and members of Congress or congressional staff?

Answer. I will, of course, support the policies of Secretary-designee Brown. My personal experience from Arkansas is that I've never restricted communication between our employees and the elected members of the legislature. We conducted our business in such a manner that we were pleased to be looked at. Having said that, and recognizing that the boss needs to be informed and not surprised, I feel that any employee has the right to communicate with anyone, but it helps if the person in charge is aware of communication affecting policy or operation.

VA must have a close, open and honest relationship with Congress and congressional staff. We can all do our jobs if we cooperate.

Question 9. What are your views on how to reconcile the goals of both reducing the deficit and ensuring that our nation's veterans receive the benefits and services they deserve?

Answer. I will support Mr. Brown as he looks at all programs and decides if we need to reevaluate certain programs and funding thereof. I believe we have an obligation to seek out areas where there is waste in the VA. There are many plans to

be considered for reform and I will assist President-elect Clinton and Mr. Brown in any efforts they undertake to serve the veterans and reduce the deficit.

I would point out that over the past decade the VA health care budget has been a straight line with little, if any, increase. The VA has not been a major contributor to the deficit.

Question 10. In the 102nd Congress, legislation was enacted that expanded eligibility for readjustment counseling to post-Vietnam-era veterans who served in a combat theater. However, the Bush Administration objected to our Committee's proposal to allow veterans of World War II and Korea to receive counseling services to overcome any psychological problems associated with combat service. What is your position on allowing current veterans of World War II and Korea to receive such counseling services?

Answer. My position has been and remains that a veterans is a veteran regardless of periods of service. Psychological problems arising from combat duty have no concrete time frames. I am opposed to any policy that "writes off" any group of veterans. If a medical need exists, as the result of combat service to this Nation, we have, in my opinion, an obligation to meet that medical necessity.

Question 11A. The best available estimates indicate that between one-third and one-half of homeless males are veterans and that, on any given night, there may be as many as 250,000 homeless veterans.

Please describe your views as to the nature of VA's obligation to assist homeless veterans and what you think is the best way of reaching out to homeless veterans so as to address their many health and non-health problems, particularly their shelter and employment needs?

Answer. VA has a moral and legal obligation to assist homeless veterans. A coordinated program to bring these veterans into the VA for medical treatment, job training, job counseling and assistance in obtaining employment would alleviate much of this problem.

Question 11B. How would you ensure that efforts to assist homeless veterans—in both the benefits and health-care areas—are coordinated within VA and among VA and other federal agencies, and linked to programs and services offered by States, and nonprofit organizations?

Answer. A program which utilizes the talents and assets of all federal and state agencies and non-profit organizations with overall responsibility assigned to the VA could make headway against this very complex problem. I am confident Mr. Brown will ask me to play a significant coordination role within the VA as well as with other agencies.

Question 11C. What other ideas do you have for helping to meet homeless veterans' needs?

Answer. I have no other specific ideas at this time. I am confident however that Mr. Brown will devote much thought to new ideas.

Question 12A. What is your view of the current relationships between VA, the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service, and the Arkansas State Employment Service?

Answer. Our relationship is good. Each year at our Annual County Veterans Service Officers' training conference the Arkansas Employment Security Division, the Local Veterans Employment Representatives and the Disabled Veterans Outreach Personnel attend the conference. VA personnel always attend also. We have an excellent mutually supporting relationship which has been successful in helping the veterans of Arkansas.

Question 12B. How can those relationships be improved in order to enhance employment assistance to veterans, especially veterans with service-connected disabilities?

Answer. If all agencies aggressively pursue the mission of helping veterans, particularly disabled veterans, return to a productive life we can meet the goals established. More specifically, a very close working relationship with clearly defined objectives and responsibilities and the desire to achieve these objectives by all agencies involved can make the programs work.

Question 13. What specific discussions have you had with the Secretary-designate regarding the responsibilities you would have if confirmed as Deputy Secretary?

Are there any particular areas in which you will be focusing particularly?

Are there any particular areas in which you will be assigned primary responsibility?

Answer. At this point our discussions have been of a general nature. Mr. Brown has indicated that he would like me to handle the day-to-day operation. I feel, because of the relationship Mr. Brown and I enjoy and our backgrounds in service to veterans, we will arrive at specific areas where he would like for me to concentrate.

I, of course, will do whatever Mr. Brown requests of me to help make the VA a successful Department.

Question 14A. Former Administrator Harry Walters once noted that, as Administrator, it was his "responsibility to be the advocate for our Nation's 28 million veterans." He added, "Without advocates in the Administration and the Congress, those benefits our veterans, their widows and orphans have earned will ultimately be lost. Veterans are special and must be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect."

What are your thoughts on these characterizations of the Secretary's role and of veterans?

Answer. Mr. Walters has most eloquently stated my position. All employees of the Department should see themselves as advocates regardless of their title. The function of the Department can never be perceived a "defending" against a claim for benefits or a request for services . . . it must be seen as providing the maximum benefits to which a claimant is entitled.

Question 14B Would you similarly characterize the Deputy's responsibilities?

Answer. Yes. The secretary, deputy secretary and indeed, all VA employees should be mindful of whom they serve.

Question 15A. Do you believe that you were exposed to Agent Orange during your service in Vietnam?

Answer. I do not believe my unit operated in an area that had been sprayed.

Question 15B. What further actions do you believe the Federal Government should be taking at this time in the area of health care, studies, and compensation to address the continuing concerns of Vietnam veterans about their exposure to Agent Orange?

Answer. In my opinion, when the National Academy of Science completes its study we should do what is right. In other words, if this body of scientists determines that we exposed our troops to a toxic substance and it is causing medical problems, then the government should recognize and accept its responsibility.

Question 16A. Do you believe that VA has been sufficiently responsive to the needs of Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD?

Answer. Yes, generally.

Question 16B. What thoughts do you have for any needed improvements in this area and how to make them?

Answer. Treatment programs, both inpatient and outpatient, need to be expanded to eliminate long waiting lists and quotas. The VA's Readjustment Counseling Service, Vet Center, should be expanded to identify and refer more veterans for treatment. More Vet Center Outreach programs for isolated or suburban areas are needed.

WRITTEN POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN ROCKEFELLER TO DEPUTY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE HERSHEL W. GOBER AND THE RESPONSES

DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF DEPARTMENT

Question 1A. You will have to work closely with the Under Secretaries of Health and Benefits in making day-to-day management decisions and in making more long-term decisions, such as planning and quality management.

How do you view your working relationship with the Under Secretaries?

Answer. I expect the Under Secretary for Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits to be responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration respectively. A close working relationship with the Under Secretaries is absolutely essential. There will be close communication between the Under Secretaries, the Secretary and me. We will work together as a team to maximize our managerial experience and expertise to the benefit of the Department and our Nation's veterans. I will be actively involved with all issues that require my counsel, input or decision.

Question 1B. How would you handle any disagreements between you and the Under Secretaries?

Answer. I believe that key decisions in an organization are made neither by acclamation nor by taking a vote. They do require careful thought, meaningful discussion, and the pooling of the experience of different people within the Department. My personal style is to solicit and encourage opinions from a wide variety of people both inside and outside the Department. Many of the significant policy decisions will be matters which top management should consider as a group, even though it will then often require that the actual decision be made by one individual. I expect that the number of disagreements between me and the Under Secretaries will be few.

However, after the necessary input, and after considering all of the alternatives, if we are still in disagreement and a decision must be made, the Secretary and I will make that final decision based on what we believe to be in the best interests of the VA and our nations' veterans.

VETERANS CLAIMS

Question 2. Both in your pre-hearing responses and in your testimony before the Committee, you identified veterans' claims as an area needing change within the VA. You indicated that VA should reallocate existing staff to ensure that its core programs are maximized. To what programs should you add staff and from what programs should that staff come?

Answer. The adjudication of veterans' benefits is an area that both Secretary Brown and I are keenly interested in. It would be premature for me to talk with any specificity about changes in staffing or the reallocation of resources until I have been fully briefed and have an opportunity to look at various alternatives. I intend to take a close look at this issue to be sure that all factors are being considered when staffing decisions are reached and budget decisions are made.

Question 3. How do you plan to streamline VA's administrative systems to decrease claims processing time?

Answer. I haven't had a opportunity to evaluate all aspects of VA's adjudication processes and procedures yet. I do believe that the entire process needs to be looked at from day one. We must be prepared to remove any administrative constraints that may impede our goal of greater effectiveness and efficiency, improved timeliness of services to veterans and their families, a broadening of services provided, and at the same time, maintenance of high quality standards of service. An up-to-date administrative system is essential. Streamlining the process helps veterans and the Government at the same time through improved accuracy, timeliness and efficiency.

Question 4. I am a strong supporter of employee training programs to increase the quality of service delivery. In tight budget times managers all too frequently cut training funds first—a short term fix than can cause long-term problems. What is your philosophy about organizational training programs?

Answer. I agree with your assessment that such short-term fixes are often bad decisions that cause long-term problems and that, in fact, often result in increased costs over the long haul. I am pleased that the Veterans Benefits Administration has recognized this and has instituted their Training Academy, which I understand has been quite successful. It's no secret that better trained people do a better job because of their newly learned skills. But I am also convinced that properly trained employees will have higher morale and be more likely to be retained in the work force. It is my intention to see that all VA employees, including managers, will have the appropriate training to do their jobs.

Question 5. Outreach programs to make veterans and their families aware of VA benefits can increase caseloads. Currently, the claims processing and counseling caseloads are both far too high. What are your ideas with regard to outreach, especially to the disabled, and how can VA balance its obligation to reach eligible beneficiaries with its responsibility to reduce caseloads that are already enormous?

Answer. Processing times are too high and they must be reduced. This must be our first priority in the management of the Veterans Benefits Administration. Nevertheless, I think that outreach is very important, especially to disabled veterans and also to the homeless. These veterans often are unaware of the services that are available to them. I believe that a review of the relationship between outreach and claims processing would be useful. In the meantime, I expect VA to continue its efforts to reach out to potential clients as well as to reduce the claims backlog.

ELIGIBILITY REFORM

Question 6A. On several occasions, you have argued strongly that entitlement and eligibility for VA care be simplified. I agree wholeheartedly. The question is how to do it.

Which veterans do you believe should be entitled to VA health-care services?

Answer. Clearly, with our limited resources VA needs to care for veterans in priority order. The core group of veterans for whom we should provide the array of services are those who are currently known as "category A". This group consist primarily of service-connected, disabled veterans, and indigent veterans.

Question 6B. What scope of services should VA be required to provide to these veterans.

Answer. We will work toward VA being in a position to provide the entire spectrum of health services to these veterans, including long term care—both institu-

tional and non-institutional. I know that the VA staff has done a great deal of work in compiling and analyzing patient demographics and utilization data, which will be critical to our setting a course for the future of eligibility reform.

NATIONAL HEALTH REFORM

Question 7A. As you know, national health reform—which is one of President Clinton's highest priorities—has all kinds of implications for the veterans health system. Jesse Brown told us he will do all he can to ensure that President Clinton considers these implications. VA must have a place at the national health reform table. But VA also must earn the right to keep that place by making a real contribution to the debate.

Do you think VA has something unique to contribute to national health reform?

Answer. Yes, I do. VA's experience is unparalleled in large scale health care delivery in the U.S.: VA is the premier Federal direct care provider. It is wholly unlike other Federal programs, which reimburse providers for treating beneficiaries. VA has always delivered care within an annual spending cap, and has, by necessity, instituted stringent cost containment measures. VA has simultaneously maintained the roles of being a world leader in state-of-the-art spinal cord injury treatment and rehabilitation research, while at the same time providing an array of primary care services. Thus, planners and policy makers can learn a great deal from VA's experience in terms of measuring the actual costs associated with delivery of care, in terms of global budgeting, and in terms of a system that can integrate research, education, and a full continuum of medical care.

Question 7B. How do you suggest we go about mapping the future of the veterans health system?

Answer. First, eligibility reform is a must—without it VA will continue to operate as an arcane system that not only does not meet the needs of its patients, but serves to interfere with high quality care. Beyond that, I believe, for the reasons stated earlier that we need to be a part of the national health care discussions and ultimately what becomes the nation's plan for health reform. VA will continue to make a valuable contribution to health care delivery, education and research in this country. Accordingly, whatever health care reforms are ultimately implemented, we need to ensure that we will work side by side with the institutions charged with delivery, so our work in the veterans arena will complement their programs for the public.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Question 8. In your pre-hearing responses, you identified the education program as one of five areas in which significant changes should be made. You indicated the VA should consider developing a long-range program. Please elaborate on your ideas of how you think changes to VA education programs should be accomplished.

Answer. VA currently administers a number of education and training programs for veterans, servicepersons and eligible dependents: The Montgomery GI Bill (Active Duty), also known as Chapter 30; a modified Montgomery GI Bill for those who had remaining entitlement under the Vietnam era GI Bill; the Montgomery GI Bill (Selected Reserve), also referred to as Chapter 106; the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), also known as Chapter 32; Vocational Rehabilitation, also known as Chapter 31; a Special Program for Veterans rated Unemployable; a Special Program for Veterans Receiving Pension; and Survivors' and Dependents Education, also known as Chapter 35. The multiple programs, each with their own eligibility and entitlement criteria are often perceived by veterans and veterans service officers as unnecessarily confusing and chaotic. I am of the opinion that a review should be conducted to determine if some greater stability and orderliness not currently found in our current patchwork quilt of education programs can't be found.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

Question 9. I agree with your comment that strong emphasis should be continued on VA's vocational rehabilitation programs and would like to know where best you feel VA should place the emphasis.

Answer. I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on severely disabled veterans. I also believe that the VA must do more in ensuring that those disabled veterans who complete a program of education or training under the vocational rehabilitation program should continue to be followed by VA rehabilitation specialists or case manager until they have secured meaningful full-time employment.

DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION

Question 10. The Dependency and Indemnity Compensation reforms enacted in November require VA to pay those who already were receiving DIC either the

amount they were getting, plus annual cost-of living adjustments, or the amount they would get under the new law—whichever is greater. VA obviously will have to review all existing DIC cases to determine which benefit would provide greater benefits.

This determination should be easy for certain categories of recipients. For example, all survivors who are receiving less than the new base rate of \$750 a month should be transferred to the new system immediately.

A. How high a priority would these case reviews be for you at VA and would you try to break them into categories, as I've described, in order to implement the "easy" case determinations more quickly?

B. Do you have a target date for when VA will complete these case reviews?

Answer. In a briefing by VBA I was told that DIC case reviews are a high priority. As of December 1, 1992, there were more than 184,000 surviving spouses receiving benefits of less than \$750. VA has already automatically increased these surviving spouses' benefits to the new minimum basic rate of \$750 effective January 1, 1993.

The dependency allowance for surviving spouses with dependent children was increased to \$100 per child per month effective January 1, 1993. Benefits have also been automatically adjusted to reflect this increase.

I was informed that VA could not use computer data to automatically adjust for the \$915 rate. Therefore, Regional Offices must review an additional 144,000 cases where the basic DIC rate was less than \$915 as of January 1, 1993. Of these 144,000 recipients, approximately 31,500 have entitlement to the service departments' Survivors Benefit Plan (SBP). We expect this last portion of the DIC reform review to be completed in May 1993.

VA-DoD SHARING

Question 11. In light of the federal budget crisis, VA must strive to find ways to save money and stretch its dollars further. One way to do this is for VA to share health-care resources with other federal agencies. In fact, VA already has numerous sharing agreements with the Department of Defense and Indian Health Service. Late last Session, Congress enacted legislation that expands temporarily VA's authority to share resources with DoD. Do you think there is potential for even greater health-resource sharing between VA and other federal agencies?

Answer. Yes, I do. It is my understanding that the Department currently has over 600 sharing agreements with DoD that cover over 3,000 shared services. We need to maximize the government's ability to provide its beneficiaries with high quality health care as cost efficiently as possible. As a result, I believe we need to continue to explore new opportunities for VA and other federal agencies to share their resources with an eye toward achieving economies of scale and at the same time maintaining quality of care.

Question 12. Generally, I think sharing agreements are a very good idea. But sharing should not jeopardize VA's ability to provide health-care services to eligible veterans. VA's primary mission is to take care of veterans. Their needs have to come first. If confirmed, can I count on you to make sure that VA enters into only those sharing agreements that will benefit veterans?

Answer. Absolutely. I firmly believe that before VA enters into any sharing agreements with other health care providers the Department should ensure that those agreements will result in better care or services for our veteran population.

ROLE IN SELECTING OTHER NOMINEES

Question 13. In the weeks and months to come, we anticipate with great interest the appointments of many important officials at VA. What is the timetable for submitting other nominations to the Senate?

Answer. No firm timetable has been established. We hope to move as expeditiously as possible on submitting our nominations to the Senate for confirmation.

Question 14. What role have you had to date in selecting the nominees for other VA Presidential appointees?

Answer. Secretary Brown and I have met on a number of occasions to discuss the knowledge, skills and other qualifications that we are looking for in candidates for the numerous senior management positions that will require Senate confirmation. We will both play an active role in the final selection process.

Question 15. What selection criteria are you using to make recommendations for VA appointments—will veteran's status or veterans organization membership be weighed heavily as factors?

Answer. We are simply looking for the best qualified candidate for each job. Each of the positions filled by Presidential appointees have specific, unique job elements that must be met. Membership in the veterans' service organizations is not a critical

element in determining whether or not a candidate is qualified, however, membership in a service organization should not be considered a bar to employment either. With regard to veteran status, again, it is not a critical factor in determining an individual's qualifications for nomination. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs has a legal and moral obligation to promote and foster veterans employment—both in government and in the private sector. The Department should actively promote veterans employment, including among Presidential appointees. If two candidates present themselves with equally impressive credentials for a particular position and one is a veteran while the other is not—I will choose the veteran.

WRITTEN POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR FRANK H. MURKOWSKI TO DEPUTY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE HERSHEL W. GOBER AND THE RESPONSES

Question 1. Mr. Gober, as you may know because of your personal experience with Alaska, the VA has a unique program of health care services in my state. That program blends VA, military, private and state resources.

What are your views on Alaska's special approach to VA health care?

Answer. The combination of Federal, state and private facilities and services appears to meet the needs of Alaska's veterans well. I believe it is essential for those of us who will be creating the VA of the future to take into account the special needs of veterans and the resources available in any given geographic area.

Question 2. Last Fall, VA announced a homeless veterans program in Anchorage.

A good deal of planning has already been done, and I expect this new VA program will work in concert with the homelessness program of the Municipality of Anchorage.

(a) Are you familiar with this critical program?

(b) Is this program consistent with your priorities for services for homeless veterans?

Answer. VA must be able to respond to the evolving needs of its patient population and remain flexible enough to tailor its programs to meet those needs. While I am not thoroughly familiar with the Anchorage homeless program, I understand that it was created in response to a demonstrated need exhibited by homeless veterans. Certainly, I support continued efforts in reaching out to and assisting homeless veterans with an array of services including psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment, and structured living arrangements and encourage the Department to work with state and local governments to address this shared problem.

Question 3. Health-care reform is a significant goal of the Clinton Administration. Thus far, the VA's role in the reform of health care has been ill-defined or described only in terms of veterans' access-to-care and eligibility reform.

What is your vision for the role of the VA health-care system in whatever significant reforms may come?

Answer. VA will continue to care for our service-disabled and indigent veterans. The depth and breadth of VA services to our disabled veteran population is unparalleled. I believe it is in the nation's interest to champion the VA system insofar that it will complement and work side-by-side with whatever national health care reform program is instituted.

Question 4. In Alaska, we have an Alaska Native population of over 64,000—13% of the total state population. Alaska Natives served their country in the armed services. They are eligible for the full range of VA benefits and services, but at times they cannot take advantage of these benefits.

(a) What is your view on how VA can better meet Native American and Alaska Native needs?

(b) What role will the VA's Native American Veterans Advisory Committee play in your Administration?

(c) Would you consider appointing Alaska Natives to this Commission?

Answer. (a) I believe that VA should ensure that Native Americans as well as other minority groups have full access to VA services. In this regard, it is my understanding that the Department plans to establish a Minority Veterans Advisory Council. The request to federally charter the council currently is pending with General Services Administration. The purpose of this council would be to provide continuing input to the Department's Chief Minority Affairs Officer from minority groups including Native Americans. The council would also help in assessing and prioritizing actions needed by VA to address the needs of minority groups.

(b) The new Minority Veterans Advisory Council will assume and expand on duties previously carried out by the Native American Veterans Advisory Committee.

The council will play a key role in helping to develop strategies for providing better services to minority veterans.

(c) Most certainly. The Minority Veterans Advisory Council will consist of about 14 members, including representatives from each of six groups—Asian American, Black, Hispanic, Native American (including American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian), Pacific-Islander American, and female. These groups were identified in the legislation that created the Chief Minority Affairs Officer for the Department (Public Law 102-218).

Question 5. As Arkansas Director of Veterans Affairs, I assume that you are very familiar with VA's State Home Program, which provides grants for construction and per diem payments for veterans domiciled in State Homes across the country.

What is your view on the current policy of VA's State Home program, and your view on State Homes in general?

Answer. I believe that the state home program is a fine example of Federal-State partnership. It has proven to be a cost effective way of providing long term care to a deserving population, and in my experience has been delivering services at lower cost to the state than Medicaid. In sum, I fully support continuing VA's state home program and fully encourage states to take advantage of this avenue as a means of providing long term care.

Question 6(a). Mr. Gober, Secretary Brown told this Committee that he intended that you serve as his "right hand" man at VA. Typically, this would suggest that you will be the day-to-day manager of the Department's many programs, a role similar to that played by Deputy Secretary Principi, your immediate predecessor.

What does Mr. Brown's "right hand man" description mean to you?

Answer. You are correct. It is Secretary Brown's intent that I will be in charge of day-to-day operations of the Department.

Question 6(b). As a general matter, how do you intend to approach your new duties? In other words, how would you describe your management style?

Answer. As I replied to a similar question asked by Chairman Rockefeller, I believe that key decisions in an organization require careful thought, meaningful discussion, and the pooling of the experience of different people. My personal style is to solicit and encourage opinions from a wide variety of people both inside and outside the Department. Many of the significant policy decisions will be matters which top management should consider as a group, even though in the end actual decisions will be made by one individual. I anticipate a very close working relationship with the Under Secretaries and with the Secretary and expect few disagreements.

Question 6(c). In your confirmation hearing, you endorsed the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). What does TQM mean to you?

Answer. Quality management means that all of the Department's efforts will be geared toward providing the most compassionate, highest quality service to veterans and their families. I believe that VA must constantly strive to be the most responsive and best managed service delivery organization in the Federal government.

WRITTEN POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR ALAN K. SIMPSON TO DEPUTY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE HERSCHEL W. GOBER AND THE RESPONSES

Question 1. Last year the national service organizations helped to defeat the so-called "Rural Health Care Initiative." This program would have allowed for non-VA physicians to serve veterans in two rural outposts. It would have also allowed for several non-veterans to be seen at two VA hospitals in Tuskegee, Alabama and Salem, Virginia. I would be pleased to have your thoughts regarding this initiative?

Answer. I believe that the Rural Health Care Initiative was ill-conceived because veterans' organizations were not properly consulted during the planning stages of the proposal. As a result, veterans believed that the initiative would "open the flood gate" and allow non-veterans to be treated at all VA medical centers. I do think, however, that it is important to move forward and provide more accessible health care to veterans in rural areas. For example, I understand that the Department has a demonstration project underway in which six mobile clinics are providing health care in rural areas around the country. This is the kind of approach that the Department needs to use to determine how to best serve the needs of veterans living in remote areas of the country.

Question 2. What is your view of the role—if any—the Department of Veterans Affairs should play in the reform of national health care plan programs?

Answer. VA has a great deal to contribute to the national health care reform discussion—in terms of many years of experience as a Federal direct care provider, in terms of annual spending caps, in terms of integrating primary care and tertiary

care, in terms of long term care and in many other areas. And of course, VA belongs at the table to ensure that whatever system is ultimately instituted for the nation includes a role for VA to continue to address the health care needs of veterans. Further, the national health reform discussion will provide an opportunity for VA to work together with other providers to address the problem of rural health care.

Question 3. Hershel, how do you feel your past performance as adjutant of the Arkansas American Legion and also as the State Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs will serve you in this position?

Answer. During this time, I had the opportunity to see for myself the impact that veterans benefits and services can have on the men and women who answered their country's call. I have also seen and gotten to know many first class people that work for the Department of Veterans Affairs. I know their abilities and dedication and have great confidence in them to get the job done. I also have seen weaknesses in the Department, long delays in claims processing being a prime example. I expect the knowledge I have gained over the years will be a great help to me in carrying out my duties and in finding solutions to the challenges that lay ahead.

Question 4. I am concerned about rural health care as the 53,000 veterans in Wyoming have only two VA hospitals in the ninth largest state in America. Those two hospitals are over 350 miles apart. Would you elaborate on your plans or thoughts on how VA rural health care can be upgraded under your leadership as Deputy Secretary VA—especially in recognition of your service and experience in another rural state—Arkansas?

Answer. I agree from my experience that rural health care is a dilemma with no easy answers. Any solution will need to reconcile the competing requirements of access, quality, and cost. I understand that VA is completing its National Health Care Plan which will provide a jumping off point for addressing the problem. Clearly, we are going to have to come up with some innovative ideas and maximize the potential of the programs that we know have worked well to address the problem, such as sharing agreements with our fellow Federal providers and with community providers.

Question 5. President Clinton made a remark sometime back that he would initiate a 3 percent cut across the board in all Federal agencies. How would you implement such a cut in the VA?

Answer. Since cuts to entitlements would require congressional action, any across the board cut would have to apply to VA's discretionary expenditures. If such a cut is directed, I would expect that Secretary Brown and I would look closely at the whole system. Reductions should be applied with careful thought. Outdated and overly expensive medical procedures or costly administrative processes need to be the first areas cut. I might add that Secretary Brown and I will be looking at these processes with or without such an order from the White House. We have to become more efficient and get the best value for our dollar.

Question 6. Much has been said about VA health programs serving as a "model" for health care reform. If President Clinton intends to push for universal health care access for all the people, what is the proper role for VA? Is VA still to be considered a model for the nation at large?

Answer. VA certainly could be used as a model for national health care. As I noted earlier, VA is a large, Federally funded system that provides a wide spectrum of care and has a long history of providing health care within a budget agreed to by the President and Congress. Depending on which direction national health care reform takes, VA could also be useful as a model for a system with salaried physicians.

Question 7. Secretary Jesse Brown has endorsed the recommendations of the VA's 1990-1991 "Mission Commission" report. How do you envision the report? Do you see it as a "blueprint" during your term at the VA? Will you help to implement the recommendations of the commission?

Answer. The Mission Commission's report will be a valuable starting point and will be used in conjunction with VA's National Health Care Plan and with proposals developed by the Veterans' Service Organizations to map out a course for the future of the VA Health Care System.

STATEMENT OF JAMES J. KENNEY, NATIONAL COMMANDER, AMVETS

Mr. Chairman, AMVETS is grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of the nomination of Mr. Hershel Gober to serve as the Deputy Secretary for the Department of Veterans Affairs. We offer this support in the spirit of building a common sense of purpose between those who represent America's veterans and those

who will be charged with carrying out the intent of the platform to seek a new covenant, repair the damaged bond and expand opportunity and responsibility.

Mr. Gober has a long and distinguished record of contribution to his country. His service in the Marine Corps, the Army and the Army Reserve as both an enlisted man and officer give him a broad understanding of the United States military and the problems facing our veterans. As a highly decorated combat veteran of Vietnam, Mr. Gober knows first-hand the trauma and long-term human suffering caused by service in combat and the need to heal those wounds.

As the Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, he knows the difficulties faced by states in coping with the effects of military service and he knows the value of bringing treatment to the grassroots level. (In that regard, AMVETS strongly urges the VA to expand the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) in both the scope of its services and the number of vet centers. These vet centers have proven highly cost-effective in bringing the VA to those veterans who would otherwise be unable to participate in, or who avoid government programs.) He has improved the Arkansas Veterans Home and the state's County Veteran Service programs. Mr. Gober understands the difficulties facing the veteran as he enters the job market, in gaining access to health care; he believes that the veteran in civilian clothes should be treated with the same respect the veteran experienced while wearing the country's uniform.

We note in VA Secretary Brown's responses to your written pre-hearing questions, that he intends to delegate the day-to-day running of the VA to Mr. Gober, and to make maximum use of his long-standing relationships with the veteran community "outside the beltway". We think the Secretary could not have made a wiser decision, consistent with the principles of Total Quality Management endorsed so strongly by Mr. Brown. AMVETS is confident that just as the Secretary will be the Secretary FOR Veterans Affairs, Mr. Gober will be the Deputy Secretary FOR Veterans Affairs.

While in the service, and more importantly while heading the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Gober has gained the necessary administrative and management experience to run a large bureaucracy. His skills should hold him in good stead at the VA as he undertakes the streamlining of overall VA management. Indeed, we feel job familiarity will enable him to accelerate improvement of the VA's claims processing and benefits delivery. Delay in processing claims is a major credibility deficiency in the VA. We urge him to eliminate layers of bureaucracy and those employees who seem to be more concerned with preventing delivery of benefits to an ineligible veteran than with the efficient delivery of benefits to those who are eligible. While a screening process is essential, it must not become an end in itself.

As one who is well versed in veterans' health care needs, we urge Mr. Gober to assume an active role in strategic planning for the VA's future. AMVETS recommends that Mr. Gober strengthen the role of the Office of Planning and Policy. Strategic planning must be a major focus of VA as a player in the coming national health care reform debate. It is vital that VA be a full participant in the health care reform movement and present itself as a national model for cost-effective health care. To do otherwise is to jeopardize the VA medical care system. VA must carefully plan for the future and define its role in restoring the strength of America's infrastructure: education, jobs and health care.

Mr. Gober's extensive network of contacts outside the beltway and his long-time work among the veterans community allows him to bring a fresh approach to the many challenges facing the VA. In our testimony supporting the nomination of Secretary Brown, AMVETS enumerated some of the important issues facing the VA and its next leadership team. As a member of that team, Mr. Gober will also face those same issues.

The Deputy Secretary must take a leading part in the restoration of mutual trust and communications between the veterans service organizations (VSOs) and the VA. In the past, there were those who attempted to convince Congress and the American public that our organizations have some sinister purpose and the work we do on behalf of veterans somehow degrades the democratic process. Nothing could be further from the truth. The VSO's job is to advocate for veterans' rights so that meaningful reform can take place in a systematic manner that benefits veterans. We speak for the millions of veterans alive today and their dependents, not just for the veterans who work in the VSO's headquarters. And we will continue to oppose haphazard change that merely opens the door to more reductions and delays in benefits.

Without a rebirth of trust—or to use President-elect Clinton's term, a "new covenant"—the veterans, VA, Congress and the American people will be condemned to repeating the mistakes of the past. If there had been meaningful two way communications, it is doubtful that several recent policy failures—including the Rural Health Care Initiative debacle—would have occurred.

Also on the list of challenges is reclaiming the VA's leadership role in restoring veterans to their meaningful and rightful place in society. VA must closely acknowledge, examine and promote its leadership in the socio-economic and psychological readjustment of veterans as they transition into the civilian community. VA must become the veterans' ombudsman by monitoring and assisting with veterans programs at the various federal agencies. It will be a significant contribution to the welfare of veterans if Mr. Gober can institutionalize that ombudsman function. AMVETS is confident he will accept that task.

Another challenge Mr. Gober will face will be the delivery of quality service of the full spectrum of VA entitlements and benefits by the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA). This may be Mr. Gober's toughest test, and I'm sure he will agree that the VA must become more efficient in terms of both the quality and quantity of benefits delivered to veterans. Decreases in FTEEs, at a time when VBA needed another 1,300 workers to stay even with the current workload, highlights the crisis. We have heard that VA needs over 400 more FTEEs just to handle the increased workload caused by the decisions of the Court of Veterans Appeals. (We find it both ironic and tragic that application of the long-overdue principle of judicial review for veterans now causes many other veterans to experience increased delays in receiving benefits.) Now is the time to reform the VA Home Loan Program. The inventory of foreclosed properties is increasing because of the economy and lack of experienced personnel. These are just some of the day-to-day problems Mr. Gober will face. We will support any effort to improve administration through the training and education of VA employees in the delivery of services. A strong and vibrant VA workforce is perhaps the VA's best asset for helping veterans.

Finally, as Deputy Secretary, Mr. Gober will be in a position to improve the VA's centerpiece—its medical system. As we have said before, the VA medical system is a precious national treasure to be improved and used as a model of cost-effective health care. Mr. Gober can make a significant impact on the number one problem in veterans health care: the issue of entitlement reform.

Just as Secretary Brown has prioritized medical care goals, AMVETS is confident that entitlement reform also heads Mr. Gober's list. Entitlement reform for access to VA medical care is absolutely essential. It offers VA a means to identify and plan for a core beneficiary population, to enumerate its clientele and justify an adequate budget. It will enhance VA's ability to define its relationship with other federal programs and remove administrative barriers to the equitable delivery of care in the most appropriate setting. The Commission on the Future of Veterans Health Care recommends offering an entitled veteran population a full range of health care services including preventive and long term care. AMVETS concurs.

AMVETS strongly supports reform that will mandate health care as an entitlement to honorably separated service-connected veterans regardless of disability rating, to former prisoners of war, to those exposed to herbicides or ionizing radiation, to those receiving VA pension or Medicaid and to those veterans who are medically indigent including the nonservice connected, medically indigent. Entitlement reform must provide those veterans access to the full spectrum of VA health care services including preventive, hospice and long-term care without co-payment for all health care services received at, or financed through, the VA.

Mr. Chairman, this is by no means a complete list of the challenges facing Mr. Gober and the VA. We sincerely hope that the VSOs, Congress and the VA will work together as never before to improve the lot of the American veteran.

In closing, AMVETS reiterates its support for Mr. Hershel Gober as the next Deputy Secretary of the VA. We have high expectations for him and we are confident that the veterans of America will not be disappointed in his performance. Deputy Secretary Gober, AMVETS welcomes you to the leadership team and we look forward to working with you.

STATEMENT OF PHILIP RIGGIN, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION, THE AMERICAN LEGION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, The American Legion appreciates this opportunity to comment on the nomination of Hershel Gober to be the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

As the Committee knows, The American Legion has maintained a consistent policy of not endorsing specific nominees for appointed offices within the federal government. However, we wish to state at the outset that Mr. Gober's credentials in the veterans affairs arena are firmly established. In the state of Arkansas, he has served in key positions during the past seven years, ranging from Department Adjutant of The American Legion to State Director of Veterans Affairs. Both of those po-

sitions included significant managerial responsibilities involving the delivery of veterans benefits and services.

Hershel Gober's service to the nation and his commitment to veterans are well documented. He completed a 20 year active duty career highlighted by two tours of duty in Vietnam and a variety of service medals, to include the Purple Heart. In addition to his work at the state level of The American Legion, he has been active in community service through his Legion membership at Post #2 in Wilmar, Arkansas.

As Deputy Secretary, Hershel Gober will be a critical part of VA's leadership team. He and the new Secretary will be assuming their positions at a very crucial time for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The leadership team at VA must have a clear vision of the Department's future. That new team should have the managerial talent to make certain that all areas within VA operate in a coordinated manner. Each operational component should be assigned clearly defined goals which focus on the Department's overall mission.

The American Legion is certainly aware of VA's problems particularly in its two major delivery systems. Obviously, some additional money will be needed to fix those problems, but extra dollars must be accompanied by innovative leadership at VA.

The Department's benefits processing system—from the regional office level to the Board of Veterans Appeals—must be provided the necessary staff to deliver benefits efficiently and to accommodate the procedural standards established by the Court of Veterans Appeals. Actions must be taken to simplify VA medical care eligibility rules, to expand access to such care and to explore funding sources which would augment VA medical care appropriations. VA research should be recognized for its contributions to medical science, and it should be understood that VA research funding is one of the wisest of all federal investments.

It is particularly important to recognize that the VA health care system is at a critical point. If new ways to deliver that care are not developed, the system's survival may be in jeopardy.

The American Legion and other veterans organizations have been working together on a number of proposals regarding VA health care. Specifically, we want to simplify eligibility requirements so that more veterans are able to use the VA system, if they want to. Also, we agree with recent recommendations which would permit Medicare and other federal health care payors to reimburse VA for the cost of VA health care.

The Department's medical care system is examining various innovations, particularly cost controls, which could be applied throughout the practice of medicine in this nation. The American Legion is convinced that the nation could benefit from the lessons learned at VA. We, therefore, believe that any discussion of national health care reform should include a serious assessment of VA's experiences as the nation's largest federal medical care delivery system.

In the coming months, The American Legion looks forward to working with your committee as we consider those ideas while ensuring the integrity of VA's health care system. Likewise, we look forward to being a full participant in similar discussions with the new VA Secretary, the new Deputy Secretary and the entire leadership team at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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